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**PROJECT**  
**C**ontemporary  
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**E**valuation of  
**C**ombat  
**O**perations  
**REPORT**

BATTLE FOR  
**DAK TO**

21 JUNE 1968

**HQ PACAF**  
**Directorate, Tactical Evaluation**  
**CHECO Division**

Prepared by: **C. WILLIAM THORNDALE**  
**Project CHECO**  
**7th AF, DOAC**

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*Edward C. Burtenshaw, Col.*  
EDWARD C. BURTENSHAW, Colonel, USAF  
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FOREWORD

In the battle for Dak To, allied intelligence discovered enemy forces converging before they had completed encirclement of the Special Forces camp. Movement of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division into the area forced the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) into a defensive position in hills many miles from Dak To. The ensuing fighting was a tactical success for American troops against an enemy suffering heavy casualties and being pushed back across the border. Although a factual estimate of enemy killed by air and complete damage assessment could not be obtained, it was determined that close air support for troops was successful. ARC LIGHT strikes were especially effective in remote areas where entrance by ground troops was prohibitive.

After the Tet Offensive, there was much speculation concerning the importance of the battle for Dak To in long-range enemy strategy. The enemy may have gained some strategic advantage, as the allies were forced to direct their attention toward the borders. According to one viewpoint, the battle was an initial phase of the Tet Offensive, one that would draw allied troops into an isolated border region, giving the enemy more freedom around the cities to ready the Tet Offensive.

According to Col. Tran Van Duc, however, who deserted to the allies in April 1968, the battle for Dak To was conceived and pursued by local unit commanders despite the Colonel's opposition. The unit commanders wanted battle to gain combat experience and to build troop morale. In this view, the battle was not related to long-range Tet strategy.

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Generalizing, Dak To, like Loc Ninh, A Shau, and Khe Sanh, blocked a convenient entry route into South Vietnam; the enemy had hoped to neutralize Dak To by mounting rocket and mortar attacks from the high hills surrounding the airstrip. To counter the enemy buildup, American troops were deployed from populated areas, especially Tuy Hoa, into the isolated border region. Whether intended or not, that had the effect of leaving the cities more open to the Tet attacks.

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## BATTLE FOR DAK TO

In the early fall of 1967, North Vietnamese Army regiments began converging on Dak To in the Central Highlands of Kontum Province. In response, American airborne and infantry troops, as part of Operation MAC-ARTHUR, moved into the dense jungle south of Dak To to seize the hills the enemy had fortified. Casualties were high for American troops assaulting the heavily bunkered hilltops, but they would have been much higher without the impact of tactical air support. This study details the role of tactical air in the November battle for Dak To.

In late October, several Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols and agents reported the movement of the 1st NVA Division toward Dak To. Reacting, the U.S. 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, established its headquarters at the Dak To Special Forces Camp. On 1 November, a preplanned B-57 strike on a suspected NVA storage and supply area produced a large secondary explosion, confirming the enemy buildup.<sup>1/</sup> The next day an NVA sergeant from a reconnaissance patrol surrendered in a village near Dak To and supplied very comprehensive intelligence about the converging enemy forces.<sup>2/</sup>

This intelligence source said the 66th and 32d NVA Regiments were moving north toward Dak To and also toward Ben Het, the site of the new Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Camp. That camp had a concentration of engineers and equipment, making it a lucrative target. From the northeast, the 24th NVA Regiment was pushing down a valley toward Dak To, while the 174th Regiment was moving south along the border to aid the 66th and 32d

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Regiments, should they need assistance. The enemy sergeant also said the 40th NVA Artillery Regiment had split to support enemy units north and south of Dak To. The 1st NVA Division Headquarters was reportedly just inside the border west of Ben Het. (Fig. 1.)

To interdict and scatter the enemy buildup, nine American battalions eventually deployed to the Dak To area, and most of these then air assaulted into the hills to the south. Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops were deployed against the 24th NVA Regiment threatening from the northeast. Initially, the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, exercised operational control over the three battalions organic to the brigade--the 3/8th, 3/12th, and 1/12th--and over the lone battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade in the Dak To-Ben Het area--the 4/503d.

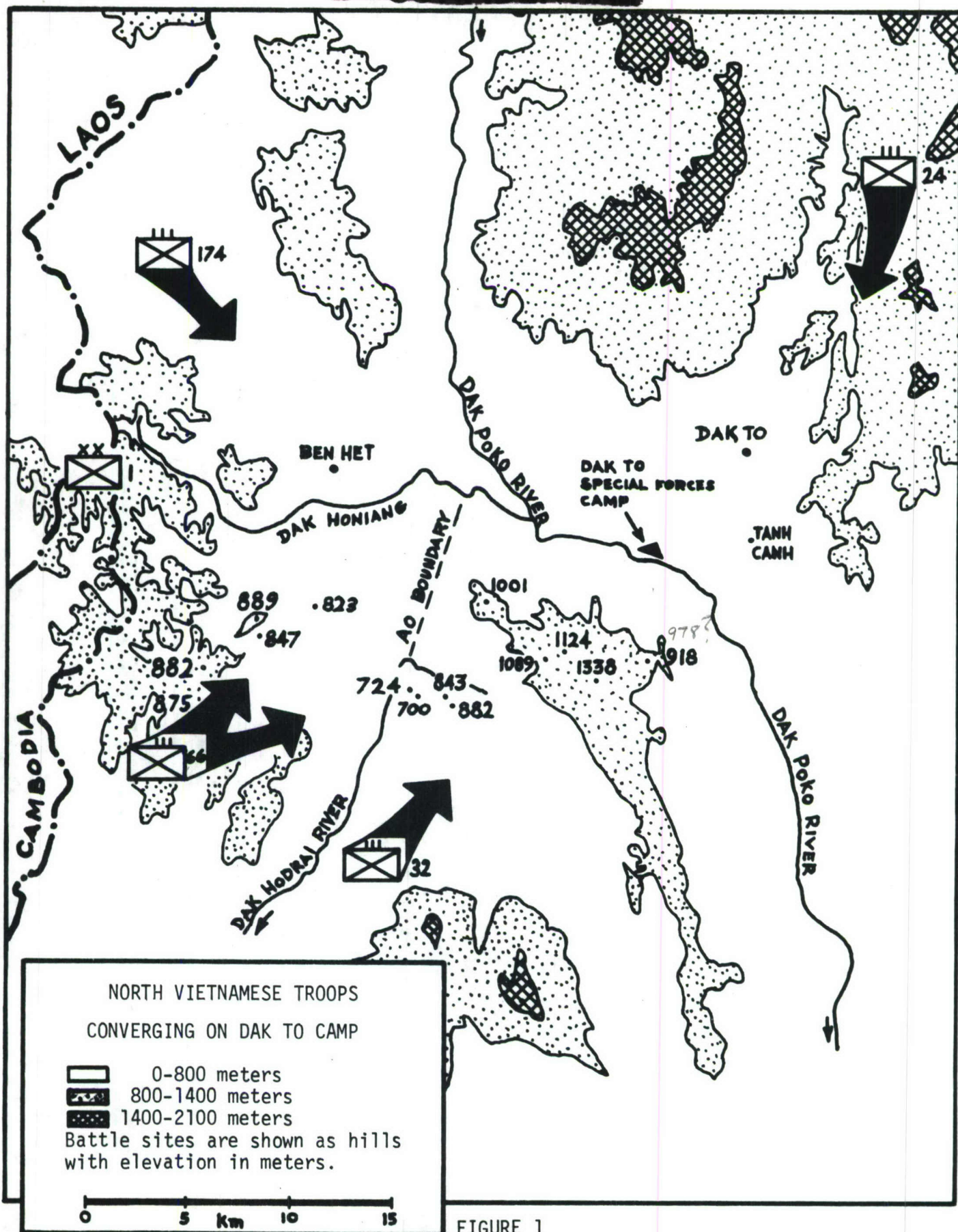
On 7 November, the 173d Airborne Headquarters closed at Dak To and assumed responsibility for the 4/503d and the two newly deployed battalions of the brigade--the 1/503d and 2/503d. The Hodrai River became the boundary between the area of operation for the 173d Airborne (west of the river) and the 1st Infantry Brigade (east of the river). Toward the end of the month, the 2/8th Cavalry and the 1/12th Cavalry were deployed to the Dak To area and attached to the 1st Infantry Brigade.

The American portion of the battle for Dak To occurred from 3 to 23 November in three separate groups of hills. On 3 November, the 3/12th Infantry air assaulted into a landing zone on Hill 978, six kilometers south of the Dak To camp and engaged the enemy in heavy fighting. The battalion worked northwest along the ridge overlooking Dak To, until they captured

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Hill 1089 after more hard fighting. Turning south for a few kilometers, the battalion assaulted and captured Hill 1338 on 17 November. The next day, the 3/12th Infantry was airlifted into Fire Support Base 16 to support the 173d Airborne. <sup>3/</sup> (Fig. 2.)

Meanwhile, a sister battalion--the 3/8th Infantry--on 3 November air assaulted onto Hill 882 with few casualties, and then moved west across a deep ravine under intense enemy fire to capture Hill 843. Severe fighting on 8 and 9 November accompanied the assault on Hill 724, which finally was taken on 11 November. <sup>4/</sup> (Fig. 3.)

Also in early November, the battalions of the 173d Airborne moved south, taking a series of heavily fortified hills. On 6 November, the 4/503d Infantry air assaulted onto Hill 823 to establish Fire Support Base 15 and encountered heavy enemy resistance. On 9 November, the 1/503d replaced the 4/503d and pushed west in company-size search and destroy operations. On 11 November, the battalion took Hill 889 after severe fighting, and then moved south during the next week to fight around Hill 882. Meanwhile, the 2/503d established Fire Support Base 16 on 12 November, and then struck west and engaged the enemy. The battalion turned south and attempted to assault Hill 875 on 19 November, but was pinned down with high casualties. The battle for Hill 875 became one of the largest battles of the war, as three more battalions were rushed into the area. On 23 November, after two days of air and artillery bombardment, American troops reached the summit, closing the last major engagement in the battle for Dak To. <sup>5/</sup> (Fig. 4.)

The fighting in the three areas had the common features of an enemy entrenched on high ground, and a dense jungle growing over rugged terrain.

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The triple canopy was at times scarcely penetrable for ground troops and always a barrier between the enemy and air-delivered ordnance. Dense bamboo and hardwood forests permitted the NVA to "hug" American troops, making the use of heavy ordnance and antipersonnel cluster bombs too dangerous to the friendlies in close contact. The overhead canopy was so thick that sometimes heavy general purpose bombs were used against enemy fortifications to clear an area, so napalm could reach the bunker positions.<sup>6/</sup> The thick jungle also forced the Army to cut Landing Zones (LZs) for air assaults and medical evacuations.

When expecting airstrikes, U.S. troops would pull back to a safe distance (though sometimes at the risk of backing into an ambush). Ground tactics, of course, called for close coordination between ground forces and their firepower; i.e., air and artillery. The troops made contact, pulled back, called in air and artillery, and then returned to the contact area.

The inability of the Air Force to receive its due credit for KBA was often noted by Forward Air Controllers (FACs) and Air Liaison Officers (ALOs). This held true at Dak To. Feedback of another kind from the Army, however, confirmed the general success of close air support for troops in contact. The FACs and ALOs reported that as the battle for Dak To progressed, several ground commanders became more willing to call in close air support and were willing to shut off their artillery cover to permit access to the target.<sup>7/</sup>

#### Accomplishments

A total of 2,096 close air support sorties--nearly all by the Air Force--

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**BATTLE SITES of 3/12<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY  
3-17 NOVEMBER**

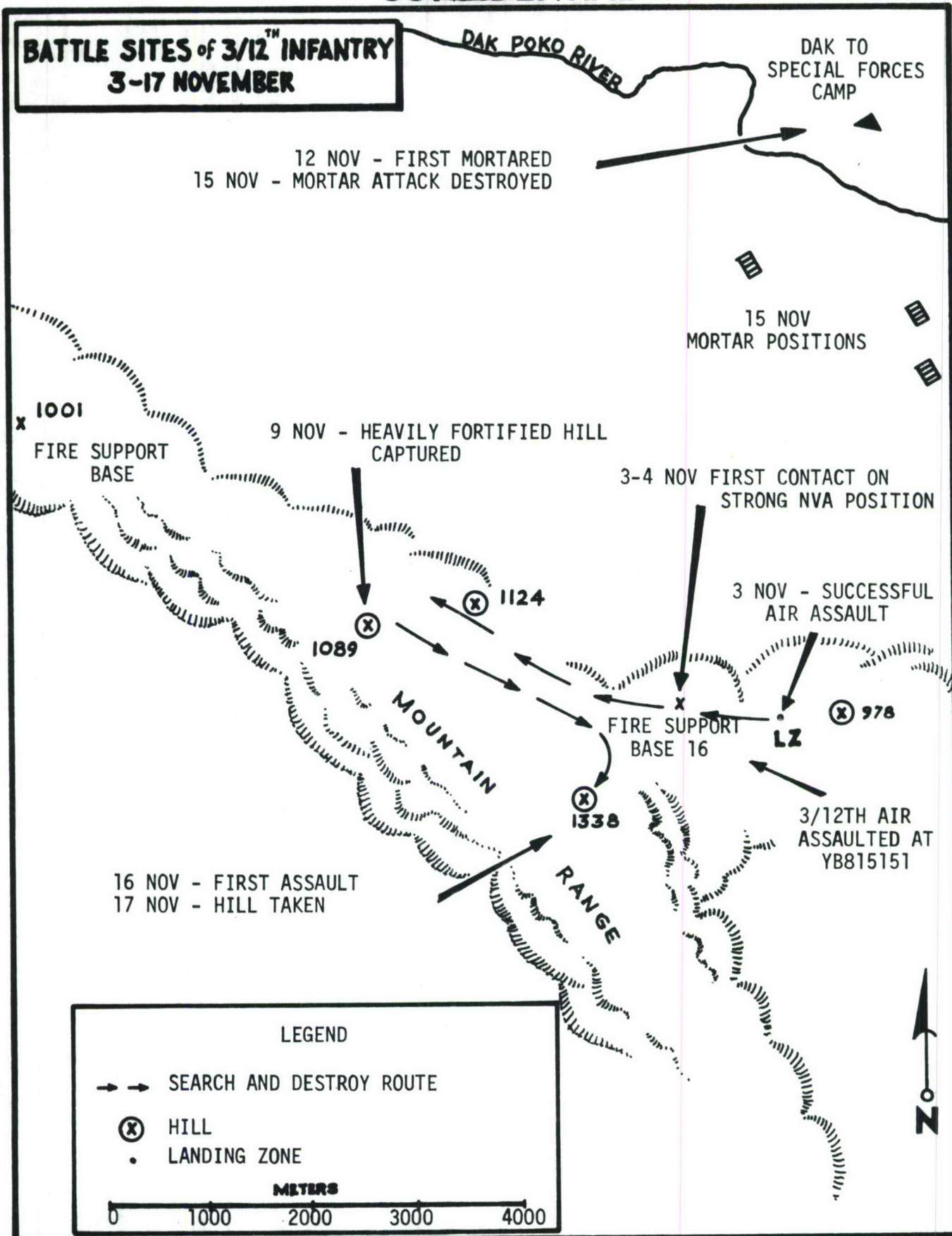


FIGURE 2

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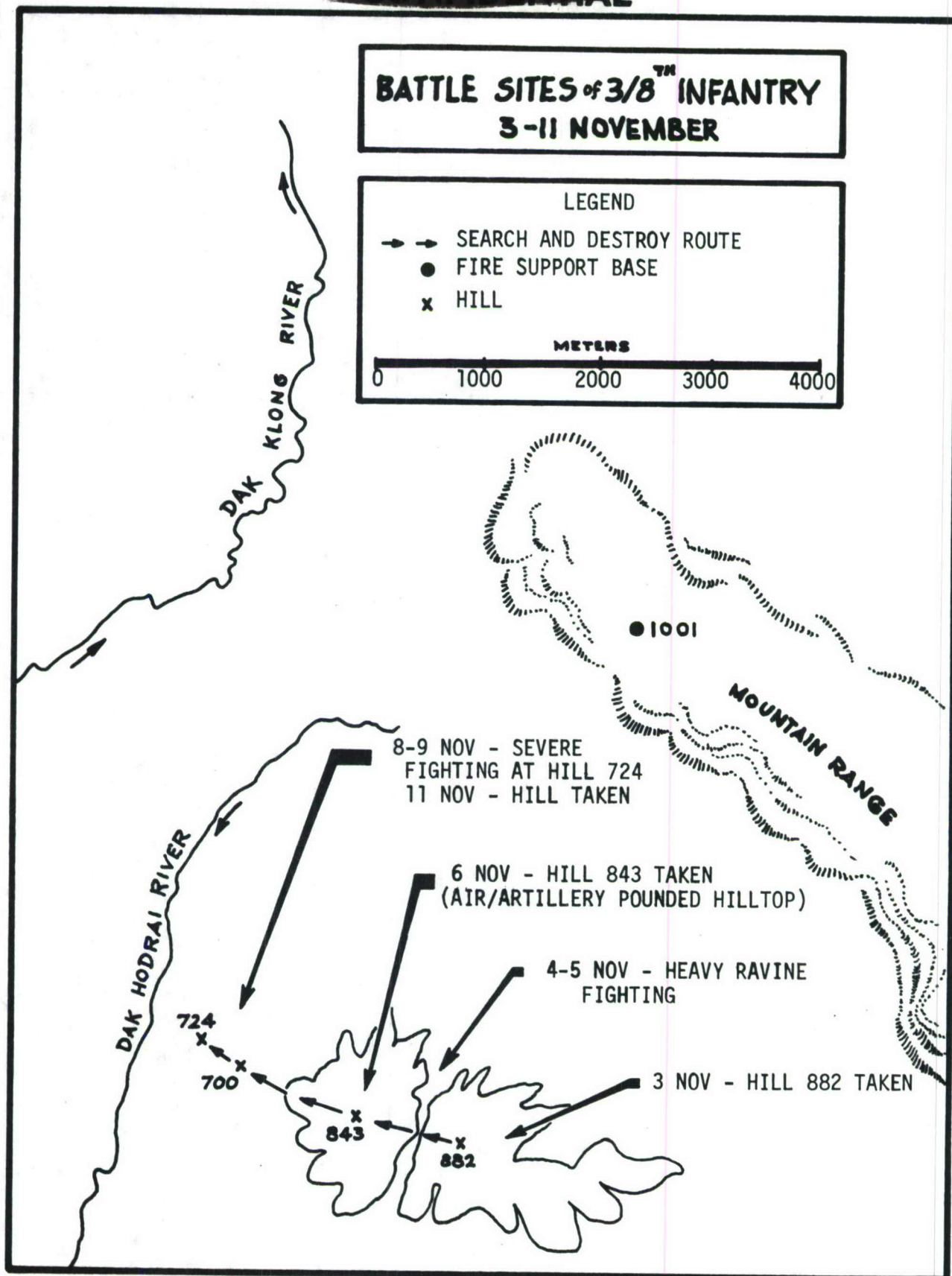
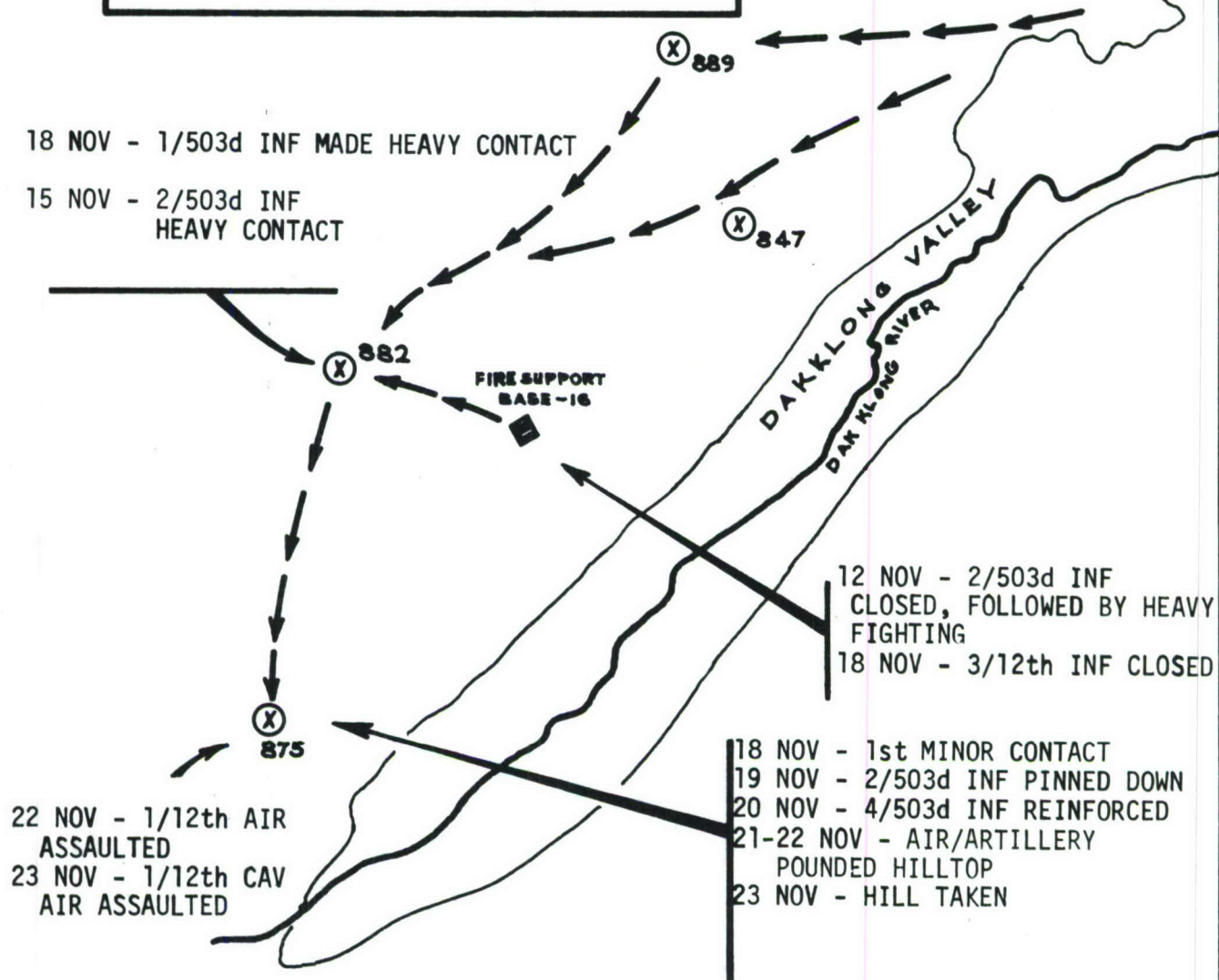


FIGURE 3

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**BATTLE SITES  
of  
THE 173<sup>rd</sup> AIRBORNE BRIGADE  
6-23 NOVEMBER**



**LEGEND**

→ → SEARCH AND DESTROY ROUTES FOR UNITS  
(X) HILL

METERS



FIGURE 4

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were flown in support of American and ARVN forces in the battle for Dak To. <sup>8/</sup>

	<u>Missions Requested</u>	<u>Missions Flown</u>	<u>Sorties Flown</u>
FAC Preplanned	529	481	957
FAC Immediate	498	496	1,011
COMBAT SKYSPOT Preplanned	60	48	49
COMBAT SKYSPOT Immediate	20	13	17
Spooky	65	62	62
TOTALS	1,172	1,100	2,096

The fighter/bomber sorties were half preplanned and half immediates (1,006 sorties versus 1,028 sorties). The sorties by aircraft were as follows: <sup>9/</sup>

A-1E	198	A-4	6
B-57	30	A-6	3
F-4C	244	AC-47	61 (Spooky)
F-100	1,527	C-130	1 (Spooky)
A-37	26		

In flying these sorties, one Air Force aircraft was destroyed. On 19 November, eight kilometers east of the Dak To Special Forces Camp, the number two aircraft of an F-4 flight followed the lead into a target delivering napalm. There was ground fire, an explosion, and then flames. The aircraft crashed into the target area. The pilot was recovered but the aircraft commander was missing in action. <sup>10/</sup>

Official statistics for the battle for Dak To gave a total enemy body count of 1,227 caused by American troops and 417 by Vietnamese forces. Friendly losses included 283 Americans and 61 Vietnamese killed. <sup>11/</sup> An estimated 544 enemy were killed by air, along with an estimated 177 bunkers destroyed and 138 secondary explosions or fires touched off. Estimated KBA included 103 by FAC preplanned sorties and 408 by FAC immediates, which compared with

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actual sortie percentages as follows: <sup>12/</sup>

	<u>Sorties</u> <u>(Percent)</u>	<u>KBA</u> <u>(Percent)</u>
FAC Preplanned	49	20
FAC Immediate	51	80

COMBAT SKYSPOT KBA were not estimated.

The 4th Infantry Division made the observation that this damage assessment did "not show the true destruction wrought by tactical air." <sup>13/</sup> Some enemy sites were destroyed beyond recognition; the enemy often policed sites before friendly troops could reach the area, and many B-52 mission areas were never entered by ground units. The division's After Action Report also termed "an exercise in futility" the attempt to differentiate between air and artillery destruction. <sup>14/</sup>

There were 257 B-52 sorties in support of American units and 48 sorties in support of ARVN troops northeast of Dak To. <sup>15/</sup> (Fig. 5.) In the target areas south and west of the major engagements, numerous secondary explosions occurred, as well as harassment of fortifications and infiltration routes. ARC LIGHT strikes were especially effective in destroying enemy ammunition caches along remote ravines that could not be searched by ground troops. <sup>16/</sup>

The After Action Report for the 4th Infantry Division contained the following general comments on Air Force air support: <sup>17/</sup>

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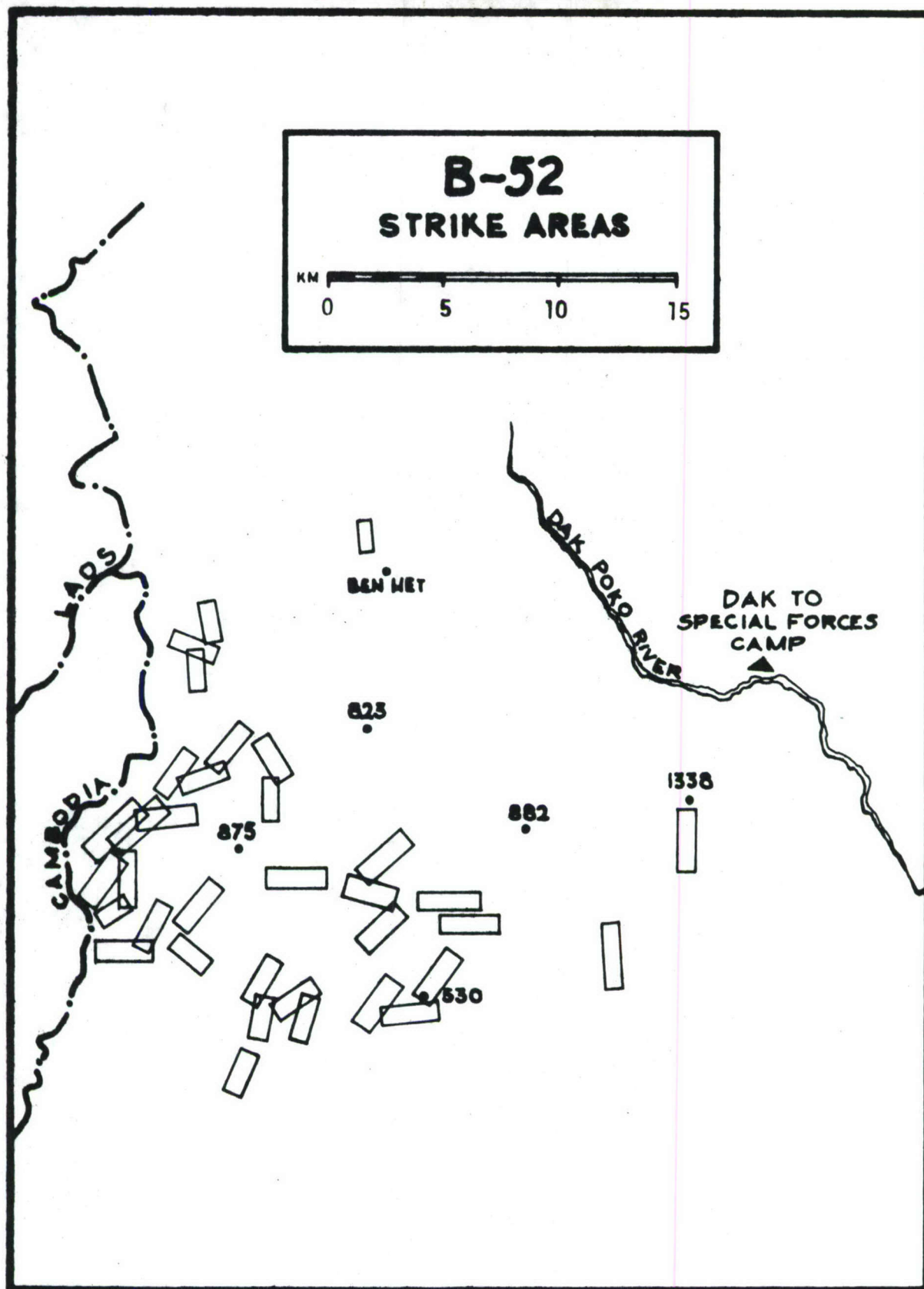


FIGURE 5

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*"Tactical air was used to the maximum in support of ground forces in contact with a disciplined, well-equipped and well-trained enemy who chose to stand and fight from heavily fortified positions....The spirit and dedication of the US Air Force to give close and continuous tactical air support to the ground forces can best be described by the fact some pilots flew three and four sorties in one day. Considering the flight time, time over target, and rearming of the aircraft, this is a tremendous feat. Forward Air Controllers spent eight to ten hours a day over target areas, landing only to tactically rearm with rockets and fuel. Night time was virtually non-existent as flares from Spooky aircraft were used to permit the FACs to see their targets. Tactical air support was close and continuous regardless of the time or place."*

The After Action Report for the 173d Airborne Brigade also praised the  
air support received: 18/

*"Tactical Air Support was extremely effective during this operation. Bomb damage assessments reflected numerous secondary explosions as a result of strikes, and mortar and rocket positions were silenced on several occasions. Heavily reinforced bunkers and trench systems were difficult to detect and destroy even with the jungle canopy removed."*

*"Sorties arrived within a usable time frame and were effectively employed. Immediate strikes were provided on a continuing basis. Close coordination with support channels prevented aircraft having to hold over the target for continuous periods. At no time when troops were in contact were aircraft not available."*

To help provision the thousands of newly arrived troops, a total of 308 C-130 sorties were flown into Dak To during November. Along with 600 tons of provisions hauled daily by truck convoy, an additional 300 tons came by air-lift, mostly in programmed blocks of 20 sorties a day. Such scheduling greatly reduced requests for emergency resupply. By 13 November, the ground and air resupply had achieved the desired three-day stock level. 19/

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On 15 November, the supply area in the vicinity of the airfield and the parking ramp received a mortar attack launched from the low foothills south of Dak To. (Fig. 6.) That morning, four C-130s stood on the parking ramp when a few mortar rounds landed there, setting it afire and destroying two C-130s. The third aircraft received shrapnel damage and began leaking fuel badly. Its pilot and loadmaster risked their lives to back the aircraft away from the fires. The crew of the fourth C-130 flew their undamaged aircraft out during the attack.

The ammunition supply point also took several direct hits and burned out of control throughout the day and night; its massive explosions closed the airstrip. The next day, EOD personnel cleared the airstrip, which reopened on 17 November, with the restriction of only one C-130 on the ground at any one time. Two days later the airlift resumed, making C-130s available to fly out casualties of the battle for Hill 875. On 21 November, an Air Force Casualty Staging Facility was established at Dak To. <sup>20/</sup>

#### Hill 823

Illustrating a representative engagement around Dak To, the fight for Hill 823 on 6 November, had the four companies of the 4/503d Infantry moving out of Fire Support Base 12 to secure a ridge six kilometers south of Ben Het, and establishing Fire Support Base 15 on Hill 823. The action began with two airstrikes that morning to clear a small LZ for the engineering platoon on the east slope of Hill 823. An additional seven strikes by A-1Es and F-4s were later used to clear the main LZ on the hilltop. The A-1Es dropped 500-pound bombs with daisy cutters (pipe extensions on the bomb nose to insure detonation above ground for maximum area clearance), and the F-100s put in

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C-130s Under Mortar Attack  
Figure 6

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1,000-pound bombs. <sup>21/</sup>

After the last strike at 1315 hours, the Army's command and control helicopter checked the area and at 1345 hours declared the LZ ready to receive Bravo Company, which completed the assault without incident. The company found numerous trenches, bunkers, weapons, and packs of new clothing, indicating an estimated battalion had been driven from the hill by air and artillery. At 1430H, an estimated 30 enemy attacked through the heavy bamboo but Bravo repulsed the 20-minute assault. <sup>22/</sup>

While Bravo fought on Hill 823, Delta Company was under much heavier attack a few kilometers to the north. Delta was one of the three sister companies of Bravo that had moved south separately on foot from Fire Support Base 12. By early afternoon, the three companies were two kilometers north of Hill 823. At 1405H, Delta received automatic weapons fire, while moving west, and requested an airstrike. Fifteen minutes later, two F-4s--call sign Hammer 21--arrived with napalm and 750-pound bombs. The FAC directing the flight described the action: <sup>23/</sup>

*"The first bombs were dropped on the northern side of the ridge line...Then they dropped napalm to the west and the east side of the friendly positions. This napalm was dropped approximately 100 to 150 meters to the west and approximately 75 meters to the east of the friendly positions. Due to the AW fire being very intense in those two locations, I held the fighters with the bombs high and dry while we put the napalm in there.*

*"They then began to receive heavy AW fire from the ridgeline to the north of their position and between where the first bombs had hit and the bottom of the ridge. The company commander implied on the radio that*

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*it was a very, very desperate situation. So I elected to ask the fighter to drop his remaining three #750 bombs in a string on a generally west to east heading and it turned out to be about 70 meters from the friendly location. His three bombs struck on the southwest base of the ridge somewhere around 848202 or 203 and ended up about 70 meters from the friendly position. The friendly commander was very excited at this time and asked us to call off the air strikes. They were too close and he didn't have any holes to put his people in. But the commanding general of the 173rd Airborne, I believe his name is General Schweiter, was flying around at that time and he later commented that the air strike was exactly where it had to be."*

An estimated NVA company with fully automatic weapons then made another coordinated attack against the surrounded company. So serious was the situation that the FAC violated a cardinal rule and ran a set of F-4s--Hammer 31--directly into the friendlies, dropping napalm within 20 to 25 meters of the troops. One fighter also placed two cans of napalm on the NVA attacking the rear of the company perimeter. <sup>24/</sup> According to the company's After Action Report, its napalm "routed" the enemy and "left only 15 charred bodies as evidence." <sup>25/</sup>

Because of the extreme danger of being overrun, the ground forces elected to risk using 500 and 750-pound bombs in close air support. When the bombs were expended within 70 meters of the friendly forces, this caused some minor shrapnel wounds to men in forward positions outside the perimeter. The FAC <sup>26/</sup> gave Hammer 31 an estimated 15 KBA and Hammer 21 an estimated 13 KBA.

At 1500H, an hour after the second airstrike, the NVA mounted a third attack, which the ground forces repulsed. At 1530H, a helicopter gunship

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wounded one American when the smoke marking Delta Company's perimeter was unable to penetrate the triple canopy. At 1730H, Alpha reinforced Delta and the perimeter was marked with yellow smoke to guide the third and final airstrike. The After Action Report noted the "strike was very close to the perimeter and quieted all movement in the vicinity." Another enemy attack occurred just after 1800H, but there was only minor action throughout the night.

The first airstrike had gone to the aid of Delta Company, because it had been moving when attacked and had no prepared positions. Bravo on Hill 823 was luckier. By chance, the 1,000-pound bombs used in building the LZ were equipped with delayed fuses and created several large craters. During the enemy rocket and mortar attacks, the friendly forces took shelter in the craters, saving many lives. They also placed the two company mortars down 12 to 14 feet in one crater.

Throughout the afternoon, the close air support at Hill 823 was coordinated by the FAC circling the battle site and by an Army major airlifted into the LZ who assumed direction of all tactical airstrikes. The 500 and 750-pound bombs were dropped away from the perimeter, although the 500-pound high drag bombs were moved nearer "due to their small size and their ability to work closer to the friendlies." <sup>27/</sup> The CBUs and napalm on A-1Es were put on a known location of enemy troops on a ridge running northwest from the summit.

At 2000H, Spooky began dropping flares at 15-minute intervals. The company After Action Report indicated: <sup>28/</sup>

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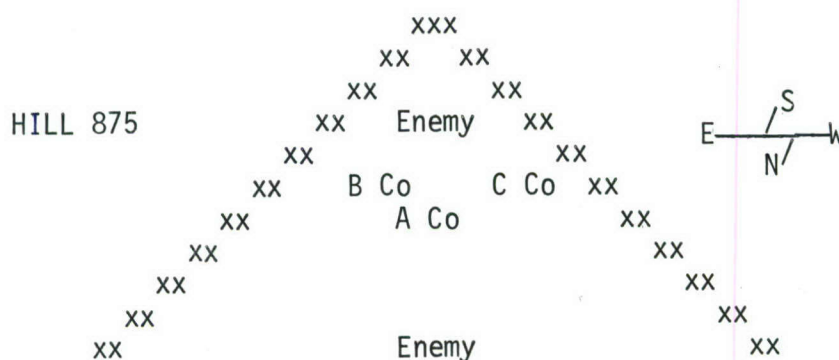
*"The troops stated later that they would have preferred continuous, low illumination on top of the hill rather than to the sides. Overall support by Spooky was excellent and the mini-gun suppressive fire was very effective."*

Scattered contacts occurred the next day. Final results for the fighting included 16 friendlies killed and 104 enemy killed. Sixty-five individual weapons and 15 crew-served weapons were captured. 29/

#### Analysis of Action

Other engagements were similar to the fighting at Hill 823 but require some general comments. The most common aircraft load was napalm and 750-pound bombs. This compromise had napalm for troops in close contact and heavy ordnance for well-fortified enemy positions. Consistently, in the crucial moments of heavy engagements only napalm could be risked against enemy "clinging" to friendly troops. Sometimes aircraft with napalm and other ordnance would drop the napalm in support of troops in close contact, and then request a different target for the bombs and CBUs.

One tragic short round did occur from the use of heavy bombs near friendly troops. On Hill 875, on 19 November, Companies Bravo and Charlie moved toward the fortified hilltop, leaving Alpha Company to protect the rear



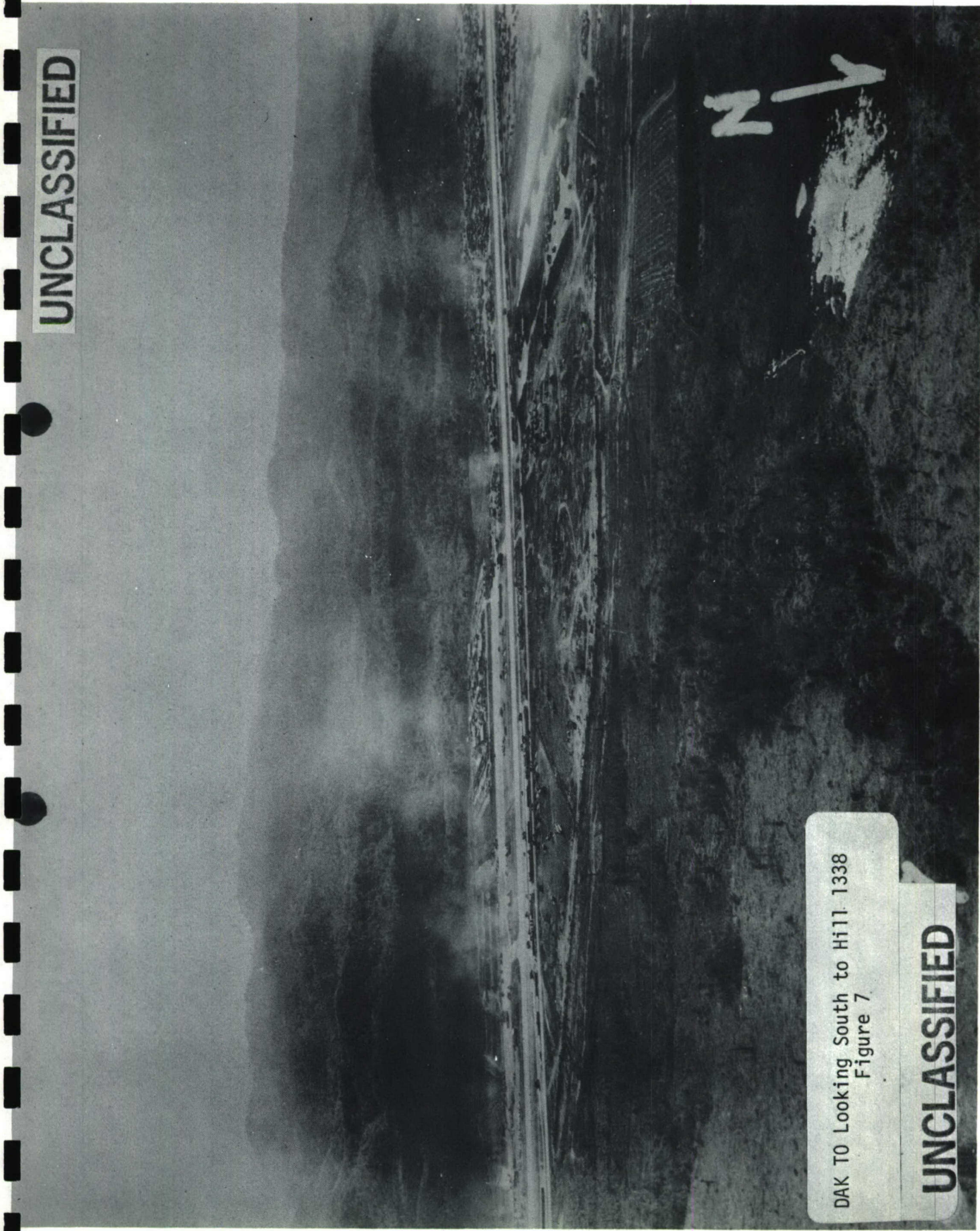
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DAK T0 Looking South to Hill 1338  
Figure 7

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and flanks. An NVA attack from the rear pushed Alpha up the hill, squeezing it against its sister companies who were pinned down by enemy fire from the hilltop. Tactical air and helicopter gunships bombarded and strafed the perimeters, making passes on a SE to NW tangent to the perimeter. Just after dark, a Marine F-4 on a NE to SW approach dropped a 750-pound bomb on the command post of Charlie Company where the leaders and wounded were gathered. The bomb killed at least 42 and wounded 45. <sup>30/</sup> (Note: The troops were surrounded and could not pull back to a safe distance.)

For precision placement of ordnance for very close air support, the Air Force relied on napalm, especially when delivered by A-1Es, the Hobos. The assault on Hill 1338 was a case in point, as a FAC flying for the 3/12th Infantry related: <sup>31/</sup>

*"We started in. They (the Hobos) got within 100 meters to the friendlies and worked it down to 75. They (the Army personnel) said we still needed to come closer with the napalm, so we worked it north to the friendlies to about 50 meters. We knew we had the range by then, but unfortunately, we were out of ordnance."*

*"The second flight of Hobos arrived on station then. The position was well worked by smoking napalm by that time. They, the ground troops, said we need it 25 meters closer to the friendlies. We're talking already about 50 meters from the friendlies. They wanted it 25 meters closer, which obviously added up to 25 meters from the friendlies. Both aircraft were carrying napalm at this time. The lead came in and he put down his napalm about 50, possibly 45, meters from the friendlies. 'Two' came in and put his in. I'd already told him about 25 meters from the friendlies, but I knew it was close. How close we soon found out. Alpha Company said, 'I think we've moved it close enough, the trees are burning over my head.'"*

*"I was quite worried at this time and I knew that they weren't 50 meters from the previous napalm, too. He said that was fine and to move it 20 meter back up the*

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slope, which we did. He said, 'I don't know if we got those machine gun nests, oops, we don't have one. He's firing again. I hear exploding AK-47 rounds.' We knew we were close. They said they could hear other ordnance exploding up there, indicating nape had done a fairly effective job, at least some of their supplies and how many men, we didn't know."

A FAC for the 3/8th Infantry recounted a similar situation when troops on 8 November were fighting toward Hill 724: 32/

"I was able to weed out from what the ground people were saying that the attack (by NVA) was coming from the finger out of Hill 724 up to the northeast. So I ran my fighters in from the northwest down to the southeast across this little finger and we dropped the napalm in there. One significant thing about the strike: When the last fighter rolled in the people with radio on the ground came out and said, 'God bless the Air Force.' They told us later that it was exactly where they wanted the fighters..."

"(Later the FAC put some more Hobo strikes in the same area.) So without having to mark again--just using the marking that the friendlies were doing--I explained to the Hobos exactly where I wanted the next strike to go. Number two rolled in with some CBUs to put a strike in at coordinates YB896151. He brought his CBU within about a 100 meters of the perimeter and they were calling for it closer. So the first napalm also came in and landed at about the same position. Ground was still calling for it closer, but I didn't want to bring CBU in any closer, so I had the number two man continue to drop about 100 meters from the perimeter and then had the lead come in with his napalm. I told him to take a look at his last napalm and the friendly smoke and put it halfway between but favoring the friendlies. Well, he must have known what I meant because he put it in about 10 meters from the perimeter and the number two kept letting his CBU out at 100 meters. Then on the last pass I called the ground and told them the last pass was coming and that they could start their artillery. Lead came in and dropped about three cans of napalm about 25 meters out. From the comments I got from the ground it was an excellent drop and it seemed to suppress the

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*attack quite a bit."*

Another FAC added a postscript to the above action: <sup>33/</sup>

*"I talked to Alpha Company, which was hit hardest, and they said the next day that this was definitely the turning point. They noticed napalm just 30 feet in front of them and said they could see many figures in the trees just leaping out burning and yelling and screaming. Some at the edge closer to the napalm near the perimeter jumped up and with their clothes burning came charging at the perimeter just firing wildly. They were just out of their mind. A machine gun nest cut them down immediately."*

The destruction of enemy fortifications and the construction of LZs required heavy bombs rather than napalm. The conflicting requirements for explosive power and napalm occasionally caught the Air Force short of heavy ordnance. Thus, during the fighting on 4 November on the ridge west of Hill 978, the Army requested 1,000-pound bombs against well-entrenched enemy using automatic weapons and mortars. Despite the advice of the 1st Brigade ALO to use 750-pound bombs with delayed fusing, the commander held out for 1,000-pound bombs, which came two hours later--a flight of two Navy A-4s. In the interim, smaller bombs, CBUs, and napalm on the enemy positions allowed the friendlies to pull back in preparation for 1,000-pound bombs, which destroyed the bunkers. <sup>34/</sup> On another occasion, 1,000 pounders used against bunkers on Hill 875 were delivered by diverted Navy aircraft from the Carrier Constellation. <sup>35/</sup>

Ordering immediates pointed up the need for improved planning. FACs and ALOs continued to remind the Army commanders that more preplans would

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allow for more fighter sorties. <sup>36/</sup> Planning would also lessen the delay in getting the particular ordnance desired, because there would be less down-loading of aircraft to achieve the right load mix. However, the obvious inability to anticipate all enemy action put limits on utilization of a high ratio of preplans.

Construction of LZs around Dak To required heavy ordnance. The After Action Report for the 1st Brigade stated that a minimum of nine sorties with 500 and 750-pound bombs was needed to clear a one-ship LZ. The brigade report categorically stated: <sup>37/</sup>

*"No satisfactory method for clearing new landing zones exists at present...Hard-casing, heavy (1,000, 750) pound bombs with fuze extenders are the only satisfactory munitions for initial clearing of a landing zone, and these have proven only marginally satisfactory in triple-canopy, hardwood vegetation."*

The Fire Support Base on Hill 530, ten kilometers southeast of Hill 875, had a special reputation for taxing Army and Air Force resources. The commander of the 4th Infantry Division described the base as "one of the most rugged fire bases I have ever seen." <sup>38/</sup> The five to eight-inch thick bamboo and five to six-foot thick ironwood trees also impressed a FAC who put bombs on the LZ: <sup>39/</sup>

*"This has been probably one of the hardest LZs (to construct) in the four months I have been a FAC. I would say this hill without a doubt--this is an estimate--had been hit with 20 airstrikes, say around 50 sorties on the top of that hill. There were still trees standing and we had hit them with 1000 pound bombs. The bomb we prefer to use to blow LZs up is the 2000 pound daisy cutter and it is unfortunate we can't use it, but they've got problems handling this one. Of course the Hobos could put it in*

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*for us but we have been using 1000 pound instantaneous bombs. We have used 750 pound instantaneous and we have actually found them more effective, believe it or not, than we have the 500 pound daisy cutters."*

In a previous battle in the Central Highlands--Operation IRVING--clearing LZs by air was controversial because of the small return on a large expenditure of ordnance. <sup>40/</sup>

#### Lessons Learned

The effectiveness and accuracy of napalm to support troops in contact, which were not well dug in, were emphasized again in the battle for Dak To. Consistently, enemy soldiers within 30 meters of friendly forces had to break contact and retreat with heavy losses when they encountered napalm.

Much less successful was the ordnance employed in LZ preparations in the triple canopy hardwood jungle. Army and Air Force personnel agreed that no effective and economical method was available in Vietnam. The Air Force relied on 750 and 1,000-pound bombs, although the 2,000-3,000 pounders were more desirable.

The question of the ratio of preplans versus immediates remained open. On the one hand, the FACs and ALOs strove for a higher ratio of preplans. On the other hand, the preplans totaled 49 percent of the tactical sorties flown and achieved only 20 percent of the KBA, though admittedly most LZ construction was preplanned and that lowered the KBA obtainable. In the dense jungle, where the enemy assaults were unpredictable and very sudden, preplans inherently did not have the immediate responsiveness required to be on target when troops suddenly were in contact.

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On the ground at Dak To Special Forces Camp, one significant change occurred during the battle. The mortar attack of 15 November brought the restriction of only one C-130 on the ground at a time, instead of the previous four at a time that made such lucrative targets.

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FOOTNOTES

1. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67.
2. (C) After Action Report, 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, 25 Oct - 1 Dec 67, p. 8, 3 Jan 68. (Hereafter cited as 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To).
3. Ibid, Inc. 6, pp 8-16.
4. Ibid.
5. (C) After Action Report, 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, 1 Nov-1 Dec 67, pp 10-21, 10 Dec 67. (Hereafter cited as 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To. This AAR is found in Operational Report Lessons Learned, 1 Nov 67 - 31 Jan 68, 173d Abn Bde (Sep), 15 Feb 68, as Inc. 4, and in 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, as Inc 7.)
6. (C) Rpt, 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 9, p 11, N/D.
7. (C) Interview, Maj Madison, FAC, 173d Abn Bde, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67, Doc. 1; Interview, Capt Carl Leggett, FAC, 173d Abn Bde, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67, Doc. 2; Interview, Capt Michael McRae, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67, Doc. 3.
8. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, p 21.
9. Ibid.
10. (S) Weekly Air Intelligence Summary, DIP 7AF, p 52, 25 Nov 67.
11. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, pp 33, 35.
12. Ibid, p 37.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid, p 36.
15. Ibid, p 21.
16. (C) Interview, Capt Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 16 Nov 67, Doc. 4.
17. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, p 20.
18. (C) 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, p 2.
19. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, p 40.

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20. Ibid, pp 41-42; Interview, Capt Keith Glenn, Pilot, C-130 20 Nov 67, Doc. 5.
21. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67, Doc. 6.
22. (C) 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 1 and 2.
23. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67, Doc. 6.
24. Ibid.
25. (C) 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 1, p 3.
26. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67, Doc. 6.
27. Ibid.
28. (C) 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 2, p 2.
29. (S) Briefing, "Battle for Dak To", by Maj Gen W. R. Peers, Cdr, 4th Inf Div, for Presentation to MACV Commanders Conference, 3 Dec 67, p 4.
30. (C) 173d Abn Bde, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 5, p 3.
31. (C) Interview, Capt Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Jan 68, Doc. 7.
32. (C) Interview, Capt Michael McRae, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, 17 Nov 67, Doc. 3.
33. (C) Interview, Capt Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf, Kontum Prov, 16 Nov 67, Doc. 4.
34. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67, Doc. 6.
35. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, p 21.
36. (C) Interview, Capt Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 16 Nov 67, Doc. 4.
37. (C) 4th Inf Div, Battle for Dak To, Inc. 6, p 34.
38. (S) Briefing, "Battle for Dak To", by Maj Gen W. R. Peers, Cdr, 4th Inf Div, for presentation to MACV Commanders Conference, p 9, 3 Dec 67.

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39. (C) Interview, Capt Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 16 Nov 67, Doc. 4.
40. (S) Report, 7AF, Operations THAYER/IRVING, by Mr. Lawrence Hickey, Project CHECO, pp 41-44, 12 May 67.

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GLOSSARY

ARVN	Army of Republic of Vietnam
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
FAC	Forward Air Controller
KBA	Killed by Air
LZ	Landing Zone
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
NVN	North Vietnam (North Vietnamese)

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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. (C) Interview, Maj Madison, FAC, 173d Abn Bde, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67.
2. (U) Interview, Capt. Carl Leggett, FAC, 173d Abn Bde, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67.
3. (C) Interview, Capt. Michael McRae, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 17 Nov 67.
4. (C) Interview, Capt. Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 16 Nov 67.
5. (C) Interview, Capt. Keith Glenn, Pilot, C-130, 20 Nov 67.
6. (C) Interview, Maj Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Nov 67.
7. (C) Interview, Capt. Phillip Gritten, FAC, 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, Kontum Prov, 18 Jan 68.



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I'm Major Madison and I'm one the FACs with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. I joined the 3rd Battalion of the 503rd Infantry on 25 June at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and trained with them for three months at that location prior to shipment overseas. I shipped with the advance party and we arrived in-country on 6 October; the main body arrived by ship at Qui Nhon on 21 October. At present the 3rd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, is located at Phu Hep just south of Tuy Hoa South and will be in that location for their first months of operation as they shake the Battalion down. The remainder of the consisted of three maneuver battalions all the 1st, 2nd, and 4th of the 503rd Infantry. They also have E Troop of the 17th Cav and also the 3rd Battalion of the 319th Artillery for direct support.

The 173rd departed Phu Hep on approximately 5 November and began operations in the AO in the Dak To area on 7 November 1967. They made contact with the NVA on the 7th and have had daily contact with them since. Some of it has been light sniper activity up to heavy activity with NVA within 10 to 20 meters of their perimeter. The two battalions that had most of the contact are the 2nd Battalion and the 4th Battalion. The 1st Battalion's primary mission is security of Fire Support Bases in the Dak To area. E Troop of the 17th Cav is the brigade reaction force and, as I mentioned, the 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery, provides direct support to the brigade.

I arrived at Phu Hep from in-processing at the 19th TASS on 4 November and the Brigade moved to Dak To on 5 November 1967. I got two rides as area check-out and due to the - our units being in heavy contact I started FACing at that point on my own. I found the Brigade Commander in three of the four battalions very air minded and used air at every opportunity.

One of the battalions shows a preference for artillery and mortar fire and this has proved unfortunate for them, I feel, in that they are one of the battalions that has been in heavy contact. To cite one specific instance for why I feel that it is unfortunate in their case: On the 13th of November one company of this battalion made contact with an unknown NVA force

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Downgraded at 3 year intervals;  
Declassified after 12 years

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at Hill 847 coordinates 8317 and at first they thought it was sniper fire and moved an element of about 10 people in to take care of this sniper. However, it turned out to be a sizeable NVA force and these 10 people were cut off from the rest of the Company.

Night was approaching and the company has already suffered several casualties. I was over the area and had a flight of HOBO's - two A-1Es - holding with the napalm and CBU's and 20mm. I informed the Battalion Commander that I had the HOBO's. He consulted the Company Commander. They were firing or had to begin to fire artillery and mortars but were having to adjust it into their position and the Company Commander said that he could use the air strike. But when I informed him that he would have to turn off the artillery, he said if he had to make a choice he would prefer the artillery and the mortars and at this time the artillery was firing a good 2,000 meters to the west and they were slowly adjusting it into their position and still receiving heavy fire from the NVA.

Also in his comment the Company Commander informed the Battalion Commander that he was standing in something up to his neck and I again informed the Battalion Commander that I thought I could get them off his back with the HOBO's, but the Company Commander insisted that, if he had to make a choice, he would prefer the artillery and mortars. Shortly thereafter, the Brigade Commander called the Battalion Commander and told him to expend the HOBO's if at all possible. About 30 minutes later, out of fuel, I was relieved by another Tonto and the HOBO's were still not expended.

I believe the Brigade Commander had a talk with the Battalion Commander that evening and the next morning they were still pinned down by the same NVA and the 10 man element that was cut off was still outside the perimeter, but the Battalion Commander was quite receptive to air the next morning. And we did put in several air strikes in close proximity to his position enabling him to break contact with the NVA. After the contact was over the results were friendly casualties 18 KIA, 17 WIA and five missing.

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Instances like this I have found have been the exception rather than the rule. I have also found the Company Commanders - the people who are in contact - really appreciate the air. One Company Commander gave me a call after I had put in an airstrike for him and told me to please let the fighter pilots know they have saved his butt not once but twice in two days and that he and his troops were certainly appreciative.

I put in one airstrike in very close proximity to this Company that I just referred to in the vicinity of 700 at coordinates 838185. They were pinned down by NVA snipers and also an automatic weapon. I put two 750 pound bombs within about 50 to 75 meters and I will have to admit that they were a little closer than I intended but the bombs had no sooner hit then the Company Commander said they were perfect but please don't bring them any closer until we can dig a little deeper. But shortly thereafter he told me that he was able to break contact and the automatic weapon didn't fire anymore.

One thing that is quite prevalent with the Battalion Commanders and the Army Commanders at battalion level and above - they are quite reluctant to conduct body count as KBA-killed by air. I can cite one conversation that a Tonto FAC overheard between a Battalion Commander and a Company Commander. The Company Commander called his Battalion Commander and told him that they had found 10 bodies that appeared to be killed by air two days previous. The Battalion Commander quickly reminded him that mortars had been fired into that position and he thought that mortars probably got them. The Company Commander reminded him the mortars were fired last night and the bodies appeared to be two days old. Well, the Battalion Commander again reminded him that mortars had fired into that area and he believed that the mortars got them. By this time the Company Commander had caught on and said Roger, sir, but the maggots might argue with you a little bit on that.

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I've made a practice that every time I put in airstrikes with troops in contact.... I press the battalion commander and also his operations officer to let us know what they find when they move into that area. Occasionally they do and occasionally they don't. Of course, they are the ones that police the area and they are the ones who more or less determine how they were killed. At our level anyway it's a small matter to me who kills them, but our pilots are doing a fantastic job and, even though the company commanders appreciate it, I feel the credit isn't being given to the pilots.

On the evening of the 15th of November about an hour before last light a company made contact with the NVA on Hill 889 in the vicinity of coordinates of 824182. The NVA were located on the highest ground on 889 and the friendlies were moving from east to west towards that location. The friendlies used the same tactic that is quite prevalent or seems to be quite prevalent here. Once they make contact, if air is available, they pull back immediately and put air on the target. Then they will send out a probe and if contact is re-established, they will once again pull back, put artillery, air or mortars on the target once again, and then re-probe to see if there is more contact.

In this case when they made contact they pulled back approximately 200 meters and I put in an airstrike with 750s and napalm. At this time darkness had arrived and they didn't re-probe until the morning of the 16th. When they did probe again however they did re-established contact and they backed off once again and we put in approximately five air strikes in the area, once again using napalm and 750 pound bombs. After the five airstrikes they moved back into the area with little resistance this time. However they did find quite an elaborate bunker complex. The NVA had large bunkers with good overhead cover. They had not only gone down but once they had dug down they had dug back into the hill also. We were finding bodies and a few that were

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still alive in these bunkers throughout the day. As a result of the airstrike at last light on the 15th just before darkness the Army did send out a probe and they saw three NVA bodies on the ground and one in a tree. However, they didn't police these up until the morning of the 16th. How many of the NVA that will be assessed as KBA I don't know but I have been pressing the battalion commander and the battalion three all day to give me a readout as to what he finds in that area. As yet I don't have a satisfactory answer.

The general pattern since we arrived at Dak To has been to establish Fire Support Bases moving from Dak To down to the valley to the southwest. At each Fire Support Base we put in further to the southwest we usually get contact for a couple of days and then the contact dies off, but when we move further to the southwest we get contact once again. I would like to emphasize once again that the company commander really appreciate the air. They are quick to praise the pilot for their good work and the pilots are doing a fantastic job. Yet the higher the level you go the less you hear of the good work air is doing. It has been my experience here that once the cry goes out that troops are in contact that the entire air force in this area drop whatever they are doing and converge on the scene. Its nothing unusual or hasn't been anything unusual to have as many five sets of fighters stacked up waiting to get on a target with troops in contact. The reaction time to troops in contact has been really good in my opinion. I don't think we have had troops in contact since I have been here when it took over 20 minutes to get a set of fighters. Usually it is much less time than this because the DASC always seems to have three or four that they can divert and they are on the scene within seven to ten minutes.

There is one impression that the battalion commanders have that we have been unable to dispell. This possibly results from the HOBOS that support us because the HOBOS can spend three to four hours on target. The jet fighters arrive and they can spend 10 to 30 minutes on target. The battalion commanders tend to believe that they can stockpile fighter strikes the same way they can artillery rounds and they usually wait until the last minute to expend them. We have lost some effectiveness with the fighters

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due to this. However, we are constantly reminding the battalion commanders that once the fighters get into the area for maximum effectiveness we must locate the friendly positions right away and get the fighter aircraft on target. I have only run into one or two instances where the ground unit have been unable to mark their position with smoke. I believe in both cases these units had been on extended operations and they were just running a little short on their supply of smoke. Usually their very happy to mark their positions and, once the fighters are overhead, they keep continuous smoke coming from their position.

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Interview, Captain Carl L. Leggett, FAC, 173rd Airborne Brigade,  
Kontum Province, 17 Nov 67,

I am TONTO FAC working with the 173rd Brigade out of Dak To. I arrived at Dak To on the 10th of November after the 173rd had left Phu Hep and moved back here. When I got there on the 10th they had already had some pretty heavy contacts. I got involved mainly when the 2nd was preparing to move out to Fire Support Base 16, which is located at YB8115. In preparing the Fire Support Base we had several sets of fighters that came up about the 11th of November to put in strikes on those two hills at 8115. In putting in the fighters out there we uncovered several bunkers and we went back the next day and hit it again. They put some artillery in there also and they were planning to go in that day but changed their plans. We hit it more the next morning and they went in to this Fire Support Base --- that was about the 12th of November--- and immediately upon going in they encountered some pretty good contacts.

On the morning of the 13th I had the first flight of the morning. That morning I went out to this Fire Support Base and they were in contact at about YB812148. They were pulling back. They had lost a few people out there and got some of the enemy, also, and they were pulling back when my fighters arrived. For about the next three days we had fighters stacked up waiting for us to put in because there was a lot of action going on and you would have as many as three sets of fighters at one time waiting to go in out there. As soon as the troops pulled back here and I got clearance from the ground commander to hit the hill just west of the Fire Support Base just about at YB810148, I put some fighters in there. And I understand the next morning they found quite a few of the NVA killed out there. I put about four sets in there and I think the rest of the day we put in quite a few more flights in that general area.

On the 14th of November when I was flying out to the west a couple of clicks [kilometers] to the southwest I noticed that on this hill at coordinates 796135 there were several bunkers up there. I had a set of fighters up so I put them in on that hill. I put two sets in there and uncovered quite a few trenches and bunkers but saw no sign of the NVA down there except for the extensive bunker complex. We had also put in several strikes out in this general area on intelligence targets. As I say, on the 13th we put in about 19 sets of fighters and on the 14th about 20 sets of fighters in these targets. On the 15th of November on a hill at coordinates YB804143 I noticed also that there was quite a bunker and foxhole complex up there.

Also, at this time the 4th Battalion operating out of Fire Support Base 15 at YB852188 was having some pretty good contacts. They were operating about two or three clicks to the west of there and also running into some pretty good contacts, especially on this hill 889 at coordinates 826182 and some of the FACs put some strikes in up there. I think I put two in that area. I had one set of fighters report getting fired at coming over



that hill and today I was up there and the 4th Battalion told me that they got a 12.7 gun out of there. There were positions for two of them up there. Also, about the 12th when I was putting in this strike down here just west of Fire Support Base 16 where the troops had contact, one of the fighters got hit down there and he thinks he got hit at about 810148 and we worked those hills over pretty good down there so maybe we got something out of them. Some of the other targets here have been real good intelligence targets along the stream running northeast/southwest from about 7816 to 8118 and also in the area more to the west about 7811. In that area there have been quite a few signs of activity.

Going back to the morning of the 11th when the 2nd Brigade contacted out here, I was flying over the area and I told them that I had some fighters. We had some preplanned targets out there. I called them up and told them we had some fighters and asked them if they had any need for them because I knew that they had been having contact out there. They liked to use the artillery--they had been using it quite heavily--and they were reluctant to lift it on this particular morning. I finally talked them into letting me put ordnance in. As first they did not want me to put it in because they thought I wanted to put it on the side of the hill about 2 or 3 hundred meters from their troops. However, it was over the hill from where their troops were located. I finally convinced them to let me put it in and I put in those four sets of fighters. I understand the next morning they counted some enemy killed out there. I am not too sure about it. They were located at about 811149 and I wanted to put it in at about 808146. They were a little reluctant to let me put it in but, after I put it in, from that day on they haven't. They have called on us quite frequently; they haven't been very reluctant at all to let us get in there. They will lift the artillery now so we can put in our strikes.

The 4th Battalion operating out of Fire Support Base 15 here were very reluctant to let us put it in and sometimes they would call for it a little closer than we like to put it in. Well, I think this unit had a new commander who did not know how to use air. That was a big problem. Our biggest problem is finding out where they want us to hit. Getting the marked position, getting the position of the enemy, and getting the positions of the friendlies is sometimes very time consuming. Sometimes when you have three sets of fighters stacked up you do not have much time to do all this. Plus, the terrain in this area, especially west of Fire Support Base 16, is almost impossible to pinpoint. It is really difficult to read your maps and contours out there.

Unless you know exactly where the friendlies are or where the enemy is and where the friendlies are in relation it is pretty hazardous to put in there. I would rather not put ordnance in and get them in on the friendlies. They will mark with smoke but sometimes this takes quite a while for their mark to come up. By the time you coordinate with the battalion commanders and he coordinates with his company commanders on the ground and you get them to pop smoke there can be a lengthy period of time. But once you get their position and the relative position of the enemy, it is not very long in getting the fighters in and they do a pretty good job. They [the Army commanders] are normally very patient with us. I know when they are sitting



up there waiting for us to coordinate and they can't hear what we are doing, they think we are wasting time. But really, it takes a long time sometimes to coordinate with the commanders and read the map and find out exactly where you want this stuff. Like they say, reading that map is not too easy sometimes. Sometimes it will take five or ten minutes once you get out there and you get your contact. The friendlies have contact with the enemy and you have got to locate their position and get the ordnance in.

Question: Did you overhear any comments from the ground commander over the radio or after the fact on how air was used? Were they satisfied or unhappy with it?

We don't get too many reports from what goes on out there. The ground commanders go up and mark a target for you if they can, however, sometimes they are not too sure of their position. I feel they do not read maps as much as we do and sometimes they find it a little difficult describing the target and giving you good coordinates. So sometimes it takes a while to get together with them and usually I don't think they know immediately what the results are. Frequently they will tell you that you have put it in the right place and then sometimes you will get a report of what actually happened. Now, the only way I know that we probably got some kills here on the morning of the 12th when I put in the flight was because the chaplain came back the next day and said he was out talking to them and said they had counted 60 bodies that were killed out there. This was unofficial, of course, and I have not heard anything official as to how many we got or how well we did.

The 4th Battalion commander frequently tells you that you did a good job, that the fighters put it right where he wanted it. Generally speaking the fighters can put it right where you want it although sometimes you will have one or two that will go a little long or a little short. Usually they do a real good job, especially considering the fact that frequently they are low on fuel and they want to get in there and get the job done so they can get home. Frequently they will be really low on fuel and they will still be hanging in there trying to get this ordnance off. It is a little bit difficult to give them directions when everybody is in a pretty big hurry to get them off. But, all in all, most of their ordnance is right on target.



Interview, Captain Carl L. Leggett, FAC, 173rd Airborne Brigade, Kontum Province, 18 Nov 67.

I am TONTO 04 working with the 173rd out of Dak To today, the 18th of November. I took off this afternoon at 1200 hours and proceeded to the west to our operating area. At about 1300 hours the 2nd Battalion operating in grid square YB7913 on hill 875 ran into a little difficulty. They approached the top of the hill and apparently the NVA were in bunkers that were known to be up there. We had been bombing that hill for the last three or four days and they had also put artillery in just prior to going up the hill. When the troops reached the top of the hill they were surprised by the NVA and apparently took quite a number of casualties. It took about 30 minutes to gather up their wounded and pull back down the hill; then we hit it with a couple of air strikes. Some 100s and Marine F-4s came in and pounded it pretty hard. The only trouble there was it took about 30 to 40 minutes for the 2nd Battalion to get their wounded together, get back down the hill, and mark their position so that we could come in and hit it. Apparently they were hit pretty hard and it took them quite a while to regroup and get every one together.

Just about the time I was finishing up with the F-4s the 4th Battalion operating in grid square 7915 on hill 882 approached the top of the hill and the same thing happened to them. The NVA were dug in up there and drove them off the hill as they came up. TONTO 05 had taken off in the mean time and checked in with the 4th Battalion and found out they had contact. He called me to see if I had anything left. I still had some guns and some rockets on the F-4 so I had them hold high and dry while he got the position of the enemy over there on hill 882. Then he took the fighters over and put them in on hill 882. We ordered some more fighters and they came up a little later on and TONTO 05 put them in on the same hill 882. Meantime, the 4th Battalion was having a pretty tough time down there. They had pulled their wounded out and apparently had them all in one little group when they started receiving rocket fire. One rocket had landed in the middle of the troops and the guys on the ground were calling for more medics to help with the situation. Also, from the ground they told us that there were three or four slow firing automatic weapons that the NVA had been rattling around at us all day. We had seen flashes and the fighters had seen a few flashes coming out up there. One thing, the fighters don't seem to mind that stuff too much. They keep on pressing in there; they drop their bombs more or less in the same manner they had before.

We had one small problem with the 4th Battalion: they had their artillery coming in on this hill. As soon as they had their contact, they moved their artillery in there and they were a little reluctant to lift this for us to get in the fighters. However, we suggested that we could put the fighters in a little west of the artillery. The battalion commander thought it was a good idea, so we put it just a little bit west of his artillery and then moved it in a little bit. Throughout this whole operation there



is a lot of talk, of course. Frequently, the FACs have to talk to four or five different people at one time. Sometimes you will have a couple of sets of fighters you must talk to. In a case such as today where there were two of us operating really close in two different areas trying to help one another out, we were talking to one another plus talking to the TACP [Tactical Air Control Party] and the battalion. There is a lot of chatter on the battalion frequency, of course, because the troops in contact are talking to the guys on the ground and several other people. There is a lot of radio chatter going on and we have quite a problem sometime flipping our switches around trying to figure out who we must talk to next and also who we must turn off and not hurt too badly. I know sometimes the fighters probably think we are not doing the job--not giving them enough information--but especially if you have troops in contact you must find out where the friendlies are and make sure you have it squared away with the battalion commander. Sometimes right in the middle of your strike he will have some problem or someone--like the TACC--will come up with an urgent message when they don't exactly know what is going on.



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Interview, Captain Michael S. McRae, FAC, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Kontum Province, 17 Nov 67.

This Captain Michael S. McRae, I'm a FAC with the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, working presently out of Dak To. On 8 November 1967 in the afternoon I was working to the west and southwest of Dak To when I got a call that Alpha and Delta companies 3/8th Infantry were in contact at approximate coordinates YB904149. It seems at this time there was a machine gun mounted on top of this hill and one element of the Alpha company was trying to take this position and finally did so. Anyway, they ran into a little more than they anticipated they were going to run into and a machine gun pinned them down pretty well, so they called for an immediate air strike.

I remember we had one coming in at the time. It didn't have the exact bombs we wanted but it did have 750 pounders and napalm. They were being carried by F-100s. When I got them on station I had to coordinate through the battalion commander to get the artillery cut off so we could put them in. Since the contact was so close the 750 pounders were to be used more as a suppression than anything else because of the distance we had to deliver from the friendlies. So I had my fighters come in and, if I remember correctly, there was three of them (so there must have been a pre-plan that we were using at the time). I had them come in and drop their 750s in pairs and we dropped the 750s at coordinates YB900148. Then I came in and ask them to bring a sape run running from north to south at YB902148.

The first fighter came in and dropped the napalm and I asked them for a correction on that and by the time the person I was talking to 816 would be the company commander of the Alpha company seemed to quit talking to me. By that time the battalion commander who was in a chopper at the time decided it was about time to start the Reg Leg up again and I couldn't get him to talk to me. He wanted me to get my F-100s out at the time since there was no one to control me, so I gave him a call and ask him if it would be alright to go ahead and put in my next two fighters with their napalm in close vicinity there. It takes so long for them to crank up the Red Leg again that he gave me permission. So I scattered the napalm throughout this little draw here from which they were supposed to be getting some ground fire. We never did get any results from the Army whether it was effective or not. While I was talking to 816 he seemed to have gotten wounded and that is why the ground communications were at a temporary loss with the ground. This didn't completely stop all ground fire but it did suppress the ground fire quite a bit. That was the last strike for a couple hours.

On 11 November 1967 during the afternoon there was Alpha company at 3/8th had been replaced by Bravo and Charlie companies. The 3/8th had a night location on the 10th of coordinates YB900148. On the

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morning of the 11th they had not received very much activity the night before, so they started moving out from YB900148 toward the crest of hill 724, at coordinates YB895149. It wasn't very long then and didn't particularly take to much time as they went from the southeast up to the northwest and then sort of entered the crest hill of 724 from northeast. It seems as though Bravo company (if I'm not mistaken, Bravo, 3/8th had just closed in to top of the hill when they started getting a mortar and a small arms attack from the northeast.

(Backing up just a little on the story, just prior to their advancing to hill 724 they had an airstrike coming in (a planned airstrike) and the battalion commander that I was talking to at the time knew that elements of the 173rd to the west had been in contact all day. So he ask me if I would ask them if they might need the airstrike a lot worse than he did. Well, I called up the TONTO FAC who FACs for the 173rd and ask him if he could use a set of F-100s three 100s with six 750 pound bombs or six 500 pounders, I'm not really sure, and six napalm. He said they sure could use it and so when my fighters checked in, I sent them over to him just to the west.

While I was in the area monitoring the 3/8th's push when this last action broke out. They started hollering for air again and it took about 35 minutes to get any air and I remembered I just turned over a flight to 173rd. I gave the 173rd another call on another frequency and talked to a TONTO FAC and ask him if they were in contact at the present minute and he said they weren't. I asked if they had expended my flight yet and he said they were just dropping the hard bombs. I told them to go ahead and drop your hard bombs and we will use the napalm if we could. So he went ahead and expended the hard bombs in one pass a piece for them and then sent them over to me. By this time they were down to a critical fuel stage. I was talking to the ground finding out exactly where they wanted the nape. I had a little trouble deciphering what they wanted but finally talked to the battalion commander, who was in a helicopter. I was able to weed out from what the ground people were saying that the attack was coming from the finger coming out of hill 724 up to the northeast. So I ran my fighters in from the northwest down to the southeast across this little finger and we dropped the napalm in there. One significant thing about the strike: when the last fighter rolled in the people with radio on the ground came out and said, "God bless the Air Force!" They told us later that it was exactly where they wanted fighters - it was really beautiful.

In the meantime we had ordered some HOBOS from Pleiku and they arrived approximately 30 minutes later. In the meantime the battalion commander called for artillery and artillery was going in. We got one small checkfire when they brought in a pair of gunships to work over the area but the gunship ran into the same problem I had - having two or three people trying to tell me where to put fighters and not really knowing. So I told the gunship that I asked the people on the ground

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if it was where I put my strike and they said yes. So I told the gunships I would mark and I marked one of my Willie Pete rockets for the gunship. I was told by the ground people that was exactly the spot where the gunship should hit. The gunship expended and they started to redleg again - artillery.

Then my HOBOS showed up on station a little while later and, as they were checking in, I was trying to find out from the battalion commander exactly where he wanted the strike. It seemed like the ground people were saying the fire was coming from northeast but they had quite a bit of confusion because people were saying that they were getting attacked from the southwest. Then I asked the battalion commander, who was in charge, if he wanted me to put the strike in the same spot. Without saying yes or no he gave me the following answer: He said, "Do you remember where the last night location was?" I said yes. He wanted me to put the strike between our last night's location and our present location. This meant that he wanted the strike halfway between coordinates YB900148 and YB895149, which put the strike approximately at YB898148. I went ahead and marked with my last rocket. It turned out to be a dud, but did leave a little trail of smoke from the rocket fuel or whatever it uses. The HOBOS worked at such an altitude they were able to observe where it hit.

"Lead" said he had it and asked if he was cleared to go in. I wasn't able to get any corrections from the ground about where they wanted it, so I had the HOBOS roll in and put his one can of napalm right on to my smoke. He hit my smoke OK but, as soon as it hit, the people on the ground told me immediately to move it to the north about 300 meters. This meant the place they really wanted it was where I put my last two strikes. So without having to mark again - just using the marking that the friendlies were doing -- I explained to the HOBOS exactly where I wanted the next strike to go. Number two rolled in with some CBUs to put strike in at coordinates YB896151. He brought his CBU in with about a 100 meters of the perimeter and they were calling for it closer. So the first napalm also came in and landed at about the same position. Ground was still calling for it closer, but I didn't want to bring CBU in any closer, so I had the number two man continue to drop about 100 meters from the perimeter and then had the lead come in with his napalm. I told him to take a look at his last napalm and the friendly smoke and put it halfway between but favoring the friendlies. Well, he must have known what I meant because he put it in about 10 meters from the perimeter and number two kept letting his CBU out at 100 meters. Then on the last pass I called the ground and told them the last pass was coming and that they could start their artillery. Lead came in and dropped about three cans of napalm about 25 meters out. From the comments I

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got from the ground it was an excellent drop and it seem to suppress the attack quite a bit. The next day they wandered, from what I was told, about 25 meters outside the perimeter and picked up 92 bodies. They said they didn't pull out any further than that, so I am sure that the air played quite a big role in stopping the attack from the northeast.

As far as 816, 826, 836 and 846 goes, the "8" is a company, the next number stands for Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, and Delta respectively, and "6" means the commander. So 816 would be the commander of Alpha company of the 3/8th.

Somewhere between the 6th and the 9th of November I was given a call just prior to taking off on my first morning flight. The 3/12th, 4th Infantry Division, was in contact at an approximate grid square of YB9717 I do not have a map to relate this exactly but close to those coordinates there is a hill 1089 which sits to the west of the ridgeline. It runs east and west and there is another hill to the east about 1000 meters which, if I'm not mistaken, is hill 1124. Ground called me up and said that they were getting heavy automatic weapons fire from this hill and at the present time they were about 250 meters from the crest of the hill down to the southeast. They were trying to advance towards the hill but they were being pinned down and wanted some air strikes put in there. Well, the airstrikes we got came in and they were F-100s and we got three sets of F-100s all carrying 750 pound bombs and napalm, split up six and six. Later on we got a set of HOBOs with napalm and CBU.

The foliage on top of this hill was quite thick. We were unable from the air to see down through it. From what I gathered from the ground, the enemy firing at them were well entrenched and bunkered and it would take an airstrike. That was about all we could use to get them out. So I got my instructions from the ground and put my first set of 100s in with 750s followed by napalm. I was given some guidance from the ground as to the location I should be hitting. From what the ground told me they were right on the bottom and this seemed to ease a little of the ground fire but did not finish it all, so we brought in two more sets of fighters. The first set dropped ordnance exactly on target again. Then the third flight was only able to get its napalm on target, they kept hitting to far to the west with their bombs to really be effective.

Then we had a HOBO flight that was diverted (I don't know from where) and they had napalm and CBU. They talked to the battalion commander and he said he didn't want any of the CBU in the area but

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he did want the napalm. He said it seems as though they were pulling out of their trenches and leaving so why not run the CBU down to the southwest where a finger sticks out from the hill down to the south-west? He said that he would like to start the CBU about 200 meters down from the top of the hill and run it down the hill as far as it would go. Napalm was put back into the trenches. Later, after napalm and everything in as soon as the HOBOS rolled off - the American troops made their advance and went up the hill with what appeared to be no casualties at all. They captured the hill that afternoon.

I found out while monitoring their ground frequency that they found 10 bodies and parts enough to make two more bodies. I had given my fighters an estimated 10 KBA and they found 12 bodies all totaled and many blood trails leading out from this area.

This area was described to me as a medieval trench system, an essentially circular trench with many zig zags. It had exit ways leading out towards the west so these people would be able (under attack to get out without ever coming above) ground. From what the ground commander said, without the loss of a great many people the hill could not have been taken except through the use of air, first by letting the 750 pound bombs blow the overhead cover out and then brining in napalm, which could get down in the trenches. So, from what I could gather they wouldn't have been able to take the hill as fast about two and a half hours if it hadn't been for napalm and they would have lost many more casualties than they did have. As best I can remember, they had 1 KIA and 10 WIA friendlies. They estimate this trench system held at least 50 men at a minimum could possibly have held as many as a 150, but they weren't able to tell. They were able to capture 50 caliber (12.76mm) gun which was mounted on wheels so that you are able to roll it around. It looked like an anti-aircraft weapon but for some reason they hadn't used it - if they did I never saw it. They also found quite a few AK-47s and several packs which they took back to intelligence to look over.

On 5 November the 173rd Airborne had one battalion working west of Bak To which was the 4/503rd. This battalion was planning to make an assault on a hill at coordinates YB853188. Major Madden went out in the morning on an LZ construction job. He went out in the morning with the four flights to construct an LZ on the eastern slope of hill 823 at coordinates YB856188. He put about two sets of fighters in there, which completely made a real good LZ and was told about then - it was either two or three flights they wanted the top of the thing also because they were thinking about putting a Fire Support Base right on top of it. We put another set in there and then ran low of fuel. They continued to order air to bust the trees and bamboo on top

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of this thing so that they would be able to put in their LZ. According to them a 500 pounder busting up trees and bamboo saves more than a 100 manhours of work when it comes to clearing an LZ. So we put about four more sets of fighters on top of this stuff trying to get it all cleared out and then I left the area and another FAC took over.

The 4/503rd made their combat assault on top of this hill. They had no sooner touched down when they came in tremendous contact and started calling for FAC and air support. Well, Captain Abbey came up to see if he could help and started putting strikes in for them. He probably, from what I could gather, saved at least one of the companies, which was not exactly on 823 but in the hills to the north working to 823. It was not one of the units that was combat assault 823. But the significance of this was that after they got up there and got an intelligence report back, we found out that on top of 823 there was at least a battalion size unit up there prior to our bombing. It seems as though we completely ran a battalion off the top of that thing and inserted one company to be joined by two other companies. The reason for thinking a battalion was up there was, first, the number of trenches and bunkers in the area and, second, the number of packs and weapons that were found. They found several packs with clothes which had never been worn. So it seems as though the airpower not knowing it ran at least a battalion off to put a company on. With regard to the company that was assaulted on top of 823, they just got in there had no bunkers dug for overhead cover when they started receiving small arms from the southeast and southwest. Some of the bombs we put in were delayed fusing and I think the friendlies would have had more casualties if we hadn't had a couple of delayed fuse bombs. It seemed like every crater on top of the hill that had any depth at all was being used as cover by the friendlies from the attacking force.

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Interview, Capt Phillip D. Gritten, FAC, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Kontum Province, 16 Nov 1967.

I'm Captain Phillip D. Gritten, I am a FAC with the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division and, as such, have been at Dak To during the action with the 1st Brigade. The plans called for the 3/12th Infantry Battalion, which is one of the three battalions of the 1st Brigade, to go from the Pleiku area up to Dak To and secure the field up there. They were planning on expanding the operation around there. The intelligence summaries that came up right around the 30th of October indicated that there were probably as many as three regiments or more moving down into the Dak To area. The Army wanted to make sure that they were interdicted and at least stopped, so fast arrangements were made. It was decided to bring up the 3/12th Infantry and also the 3/8th Infantry of the 1st Brigade. The 12th arrived about the 30th and was soon followed by the 3/8th. Very shortly afterwards the 1st Brigade set up operations at Dak To and the 3/12th and the 3/8th were deployed to the field. Most of the action so far has centered just south of Dak To, probably around three miles. There is a large mountain ridge and the 3rd/12th has occupied this mountain ridge. The general coordinates of the northern part of the mountain ridge are as follows: the ridge is slanted orientated northwest/southwest and major portion that we have been mostly concerned with has been B 9220 over to approx. 0015. The 3/12th has occupied the area right around 0015. They went into this area probably right around the 1st of November, I cannot remember the exact date, and heavy contact was made in this area. Up in here we found NVA caves and tunnels. They appeared to be well dug-in with supplies coming from the southwest side of this ridge. Our troops found an extensive tunnel and cave system which indicated that they were planning on holding this area for quite some time. The amount of air we put in here has been quite extensive. I would say we have been averaging probably 12 to 15 strikes a day for the 1st Brigade. This is taking into consideration some days when we have had as many of 25 or 30 strikes and other days when it has been rather light around 8 strikes. I must say that these days when there have been around eight to ten strikes have definitely been in a minority. I would say it averages around 15 strikes a day totaling it out.

We have needed some very heavy ordnance. The army has requested 750 to 1000 pound bombs trying to knock out these tunnel systems and cave complexes that they have up here as they have exploited the area.

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They have run into very heavy conflict and they have found the NVA well dug in with ideal mortar positions back within the caves. It has been very difficult sometimes to isolate exactly the mortar positions. The material captured has been almost amazing to everyone who has seen this material because it is almost all brand new. We found flame throwers with chrome nozzles, not a tarnish on them, still with the label attached and no paint worn off. We took kits complete, showing very little dust or dirt, all of this indicating all of the material that they were using was quite new and had been stored and hardly used at all. We have found anything from 30 to 50 caliber machine guns, some even well drawn. They have makeshift rigs with two wheels. Obviously they have been pulled by a squad of units and our troops have even found them up in the mountains here.

I would say the highest elevation of this mountain area is about 4290 feet. I would say the average area they have been working in takes up to 3000 and 3500. This pretty well takes in this operation. The 3/8th moved around the area of YB93 between 18 and 20 setting up a Fire Support Base there. They have since deployed south of this area into a very hot area and I would say all this action right around the 3rd - 5th of November. Its right around 919142 called hill 882 that they put two companies on this hill, they went over to the 91145 grid to hill 843 where they found considerable resistance around these two hills. When they got up on top of 843 to secure this hill one company of the 3/8th lost about 40 to 50 men in an ambush. I would say a third of these were KIA and two thirds WIA. They found the enemy had pinpointed their positions very accurately with mortar fire and also seemed to know their general movement and were ready to react against them within six or seven hours. Many times knowing our troops direction of movements allowed the enemy to set up ambushes and also make immediate reaction to any movement of the 3/8th. For this reason the company suffered heavy losses, probably the most of any in the brigade at this time.

They also moved on over to another hill commonly known as hill 700 right around YB905149. I personally was in this action. They arrived at this knoll right around the 7th of November and they set up a perimeter with two companies. All this time I would say they had four companies: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta. They had Delta company out most of all the time; they were the least to be hit and stayed in the field. They brought in Bravo company and lost about 60 or 70 men. Then they brought in Charlie company and lost about the same number of men or even more. Then Alpha company joined them and on the night of November 8th (the day of Nov 8th were both located at coordinate that I have just stated) Alpha company was on the western perimeter and Delta company was on the eastern perimeter.

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They were on top of a ridgeline slanting from northeast to southwest. They had all day that day and part of the day before; been under periodic mortar attack, I would say as many as 12 to 20 rounds. On the morning of November 8th, mortar rounds came in and we even spotted mortars on top of this hill (882) which I spoke of recently at 919 141. I put in two strikes up here—two F-100 strikes— and we destroyed about 15 bunkers and silenced this mortar. But we found various other mortar positions during the day. They (night defensive position on hill 700), and had a periodic mortar attack about 1600 and it seemed like all action had been broken about 1715 or 1730. I was working just south of this area and we got an urgent call from the battalion commander. He said this area is receiving heavy small arms fire from the western perimeter and also they are under heavy mortar and possibly rocket attack. The type of rockets they were concerned with was P-40 rockets. We did not see any 122 rockets and I have no knowledge that they were there at that time although they had been fired and had been known to be around the area.

When the attack became very intense they requested immediate air support. We were able to give them air support. I understand the A-1E Skyraiders responded within 12 minutes from the time the request was initiated and received by our division and passed on up to TACC and then back down and they were airborne, checking in 12 minutes later. Around 1800 that evening by the time they arrived in the area the battalion commander did not want to stop artillery. He wanted it to keep on going on the eastern and western side and gave us a north/south boundary to work about 1 click wide surrounding this ridge line. This was enough for this A-1E, he said.

The ground units were frantically calling for napalm very close to their perimeter. Of course we are always very apprehensive and the first thing in our mind was to make sure we did not bomb friendlies but put it where they needed it to effectively suppress the enemy. So we started probably about 125 meters from the perimeter to the west. They immediately said come closer. We put some in from the southwest portion of the perimeter with some of it ~~was~~ as close as 50 meters away. They said they wanted it swung back around—close around— to the west and southwest to west and they wanted it closer. The HOB0 was doing as best he could. He had eight cans of napalm and he had expended about three or four. We started closing in and we got down to about 30 meters and they still wanted it closer.

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We estimated that the napalm was as close as about 30 feet, which would be about 10 meters from the perimeter, and the ground commander was not satisfied that it was close enough until it had arrived at his position. He had already, of course, since they were under heavy contact, made sure that the perimeter was well defined with smoke and that it was very easy for the HOBO to get in. We normally would not put napalm this close, but with the HOBO working with his slow air speed and able to get a little closer to the target he was able to accurately deliver this.

I talked to Alpha company, which was hit hardest and they said the next day that this was definitely the turning point. They noticed napalm just 30 feet in front of them and said they could see many figures in the trees just leaping out burning and yelling and screaming. Some at the edge closer to the napalm near the perimeter jumped up and with their clothes burning came charging at the perimeter just firing wildly. They were just out of their mind. A machine gun nest cut them down immediately.

The next morning they were able to go out and exploit this area and they exploited about 50 meters west of the perimeter and they found around 119 body count. The Army has not told us how much was estimated by KBA but this was an actual count. The 4th Infantry Division does not work with estimated figures, as do many other well known divisions around. They say the philosophy of their commander is that it's nice to know estimates for planning but as far as results go, he wants to go with the facts and that is the actual body count. That is what they do. Some people say there were an estimated 500 killed, but all our division is concerned with was that there was a 119 body count. I would like to think we feel that it is a conservative estimate—that at least 90 or 100 of those were killed by air. I gave an estimated body count the next day although I didn't that evening because I knew that they would be close and would exploit this area. I told them that I would hold off the count until the next day. We sent the estimate back with about 100 KBA. They feel that this was one of the biggest actions and they figure that a majority of a regiment was attacking them.

Already that afternoon we had been trying to blow them an LZ. By this I mean we were putting airstrikes right on top of the knoll due west of them about 300 or 400 meters.

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Finally we were successful after about four air strikes, getting an LZ big enough to satisfy the battalion commander that he could extract his troops. One of the biggest problems we have up here is trying to insure that there is enough air support to meet immediate tactical situations. TACC was, I am sure, quite concerned that we wanted so many airstrikes that afternoon. The request went in about 1230 for about five sets of fighters starting at 1330 with 20 minute spacing. This was on the 8th of November. As it was we were able to get two immediately but we were told that the fighter bases were just stripped of the type of hard ordnance needed with instantaneous fusing to clear this area, we didn't want to crater it, we just wanted a big tree cutting mission, you might say. We did get the other missions but, of course, it took a couple of hours.

In doing so it turned out that it was too late to extract the troops that evening and of course, they took the blunt of the force that evening from this counter offensive by the NVA. I don't think anything could be attached to this. The Air Force surely could not be considered at fault because they tried everything they could as they had for two or three days in getting us immediates as quickly as they could. But on the other hand the Army didn't know until that morning the change in developments-how accurate the mortar was getting- and they just realized then that they had started taking so heavy a loss of life that they didn't feel that one company (Alpha company) could last very much longer. They immediately decided to extract it that afternoon but they weren't able to get this done, so they extracted until the next day.

At least 61 of them walked out into the field. The lieutenant who was the third company commander in three days (they had lost two company commanders and he was the third one) said that he didn't think they would have walked out alive if we hadn't put in that napalm. So we were quite proud of the HOBOS, which is the Call Sign of A-1Es, but this does not take away from the jet fighters and the support that we got from Tuy Hoa, Phang Rang, Phu Cat, and Cam Ranh. They all gave us support in cutting LZs here and we had two or three fighter strikes that were put in by another FAC that night right after I put in the HOBOS. They couldn't get as close with their napalm but were quite positive that they prevented the enemy from reinforcing himself and therefore insured that no further counter-attack would go that night.

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So they moved from hill 700 at 905149 over to the LZ we had been bombing to get them extract at YB 900148 and they finally moved both companies over there the next day on the 9th of November. They got the one out and reinstated the Bravo company. So Bravo and Delta company were still out there. The next objective from there was to go on over to hill 724 which is at YB 896149 which at present they are at now. I don't know what exactly their operation is from now on but they had quite a bit of difficulty getting from hills 700 to 724. At 700 the next day on the 9th, they were getting very accurate mortar fire again and some rocket positions. We had them spotted due south, about a click southwest. They were coming from the top of 724, believe it or not.

By the way I forgot to tell you, when we had that contact that night where we got all that nape so close to the perimeter on hill 843 at about YB 913143, the HOB0 and I spotted two mortar position down the northwest crest. Unfortunately we were unable to put in frag clusters. Of course as you know the frag clusters are extremely dangerous due to the fact you can't put them very close to friendly. We were even concerned about putting them on slopes but we did get jets later on with CBUs and we CBU'd that. The Army commander said, "I don't think we'll hear from those characters again." And they didn't. But on that slope they have had mortars over there all the time and you hit them and they just "didi" down the slope or they get reserves. Anyway they come running back up when they figure the times is right again-maybe even the next day or the next afternoon. Then they set up another mortar position because there are so many bunkers around. In that heavy contact we did find a commo wire leading from that area just west of their perimeter, down the slope over to the hill. Almost certain the enemy had a forward observer there and he was calling in very accurate mortar fire. They said it was popping up right over the bunkers, not just hodgepodge all over the place but circleing the bunkers. Delta company on the eastern perimeter obviously didn't get so much because attack was coming from the west but they did get a lot of small arms fire but most of their's was mortar and everything else there was coming in from the air-mortar and rocket mainly.

Well, that is just about that situation right there. They've been working in this area quite hard and they are at hill 724 now. I think we lost about four helicopters; I know of three for sure. One was hit on the perimeter of the area heavily hit when we kind of saved the day with air.

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For the two units badly hit they had a helicopter come in and he hit trees as he was trying to get out and was under fire. They lost another one on hill 724, hit by a P-40 Rocket, another one that was southwest on hill 724. Which, by the way, is the didi route for all the enemy here. It seems like most of the enemy from these coordinates here always seem to did to the southwest. Back to this helicopter. It appears that he was hit at bout his gun pattern altitude + 1500 feet-with 50 caliber. They figure he took it right throught the fuel cell. So it indicates that there was quite a lot of heavy stuff.

The A-1E and I that night were getting quite heavy ground air fire. We figure it was at least 30 or 50 because the tracers were getting to 5000 feet and it was quite amusing, actually. We were kind of playing tag with artillery on either side of us. The HOBO would come in and he (the enemy gunner) would see the HOBO coming and this one gunner was really out to get the HOBO. I don't think he ever did hit him. I never heard of him getting hit. But he was firing at the HOBO and the HOBO would go back out and come back in downwind and go in again. Of course, I would be over there checking with the unit and he'd start up on me and I'd ziggy out and here would come the HOBO again. So we kept them diverted between the two of us and that might have been the reason they never did get a real hold on either one of them because he kept moving from the FAC to the A-1 and back. We are not certain that there weren't a couple of guns in the act.

In the opinion of the 1st Brigade commander, Colonel Johnson, the enemy is pinpointing our positions with mortar, trying to fix our position to keep them from moving around. This indicates he doesn't want our untis to move around this area very much, indicating he might be trying to protect supplies. Of course, this was one of the reasons we have had a lot of ARC LIGHT strikes in a general big block here. We have had several of them here. I know that it is classified but I understand that this is classified. O.K., general area from YB 88 over to about 92 and from about the 125 line north/south to the 10 line. We had observed secondaries all throught these ravines down here, tremendously large secondaries. There is no doubt about it. The ground was sometimes charred for about 150 meters around craters, indicating a tremendous fireball and lots of ammo.

Of course, for this reason as soon as we had a couple of ARC LIGHTS in there, they put a few more seeing what they could get. The Army's

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vitally interested in this so they decided to go right down in the middle of the mess. We figured some more action than they have had, actually. Right at this time they moved in the 3rd Battalion which came up from the Ban Me Thout area-the 1st of the 8th. So they raised the 1st Brigade to full strength and went in at coordinates. YB 9112 right on the hill crest. It was put there for a couple of good reasons: as a Fire Support Base and to put artillery around hill 724, which they were so concerned with trying to suppress mortar position.

The brigade commander has some pretty set rules about what he thinks air should do but he is an intelligent man who never seem to forgo air or forgo anything else. He likes to think of it as a kind of symphony. Such one has its own peculiarities that he thinks are the assets and he will use them that way. For instance, when a mortar attack starts up and it is not a direct attack or frontal attack against him, he wants people out there finding the positions of these mortars. He has artillery in there immediately trying to suppress fire and keep their heads down and bring in the air as soon as we pinpoint the area. He says there is nothing better than air-power when you've got the target pinpointed. He is not a man who says artillery is better than air or air is better than artillery. He says they both have their good points and we try and take the best points of each one and put them to good use. We have had some outstanding results because of this.

For instance in the ARC LIGHT area he said he wanted more air in this area because obviously these ARC LIGHTS were like a big swath across the ground. They are not going to get all of it but what they do is highlight storage areas here. We know how Charlie is in some of these areas, he tends to store them in series up the ravines. What happened, indicated several ravines got secondaries and we put in other strikes. One morning after a strike-I think this was the 5th or 6th of November-the ALO (Major Madden) said we got about five secondaries just from that ARC LIGHT just in this one area. The brigade commander immediately flew down to that area in a C&C ship, looked it over and said, "Let's get some air in there and work out these ravines." And presto we had about three secondaries in one flight and about four on the next one. The trouble is that about this time we were getting so much action trying to knock out mortar sites that we didn't have too much time to exploit this area. We even

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found some right around this 1/18th Fire Support Base but we weren't able to exploit this is much as we wanted to mainly because so much air was needed for other points around here. In essence there is a lot of supply around here and we feel that air has really been a saviour to the brigade. We feel that it has been used effectively.

There is a lot of things we want to improve. One of the biggest things concerns 7AF and all the higher echelons being concerned with trying to get more pre-plans so we can pain more fighter sorties. That would be much better than just ordering a batch of immediates and stripping the pads and having to frantically try and unload others, especially when it comes to particular bombs like 1000 pounders where you have to download aircraft and bring them out. We the FACs are well aware of this and we have been bringing this up to the brigade.

The other day we were blowing an LZ just south of the 1st Brigade. We were going to hit hill 530. This has been probably one of the hardest LZs in the 4 months I have been a FAC. OK, he is at 875 073. I would say this hill without a doubt (this is an estimate) had been hit with 20 airstrikes, say around 50 sorties on the top of that hill. There were still trees standing and we had hit them with 1000 pound bombs. The bomb we love to use to blow LZs up is the 2000 pound daisy cutter and it is unfortunate we can't use it, but they've got problems handling this one. Of course the HOPOs could put it in for us but we have been using 1000 pound instantaneous bombs. We have used 750 pound instantaneous and we have actually found them more effective, believe it or not, than we have the 500 pound daisy cutters. They told us that they are trying to get 750 pound daisy cutters or the fuse extenders, whichever one you want, and we would sure like to use it for reas like this. The foliage must be heavy teakwood or something but anyway we finally got the 1st, another unit of the 8th in their.

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Dak To, mortar

Interview, Captain Keith Glenn, Pilot, 20 Nov 67

This is Captain Glenn, a member of the 776th Tactical Airlift Squadron stationed at CCK, reporting on a mortar attack and my observations at Dak To on 15 November 1967. We were flying a support mission out of Tuy Hoa to Dak To and then planned to onload Vietnamese troops and return them to Tan Son Nhut. I was empty upon arriving at Dak To. We taxied in and shut down engines and we were number three of the aircraft on the ground. We were parked facing to the east. There were two aircraft on the ground. We were parked facing the east. There were two aircraft in front of us, one directly in front of us was facing east, the other aircraft facing west.

Immediately after shutting down engines at approximately 0835 we heard a call on the tower frequency the radio that a mortar round had gone off in the northeast POL area. This area was just north of the runway and north of the helicopter revetments. We weren't sure at the time that there was an actual attack or whether a mortar round accidentally went off or what the problem was. I departed the aircraft back through the cargo compartment and jumped out the left paratroop door and I observed another round go off just north of the runway between the road that parallels the north side of the runway. At that time somebody yelled mortar attack and I looked for a shelter or bunker. The rest of my crew followed closely behind with only minor delays.

I had the flight mechanic and my navigator in the same bunker with me and the other pilot and the loadmaster just got into a shallow hole and stayed there for the initial attack. At approximately 0900 to 0905 we moved out of the initial bunker we were in because there was ammunition on pallets back close to the aircraft or close to the bunker and the aircraft. Two aircraft were on fire and fuel was running out of my aircraft onto the ramp. We felt it was a good possibility that ammunition around the area would explode so we moved. We moved on further south approximately 400 yards into what we found out later was the ammo dump and I joined up with the rest of my crew and we stayed there until about 0915 to 0920. The flight mechanic went back to our aircraft, started the in-board engines, and I backed the aircraft up and turned it around and taxied it to the west end of the ramp just short of where the O-1's are parked. We moved the aircraft primarily because the attack had subsided some (there hadn't been any rounds come in for a few minutes), our aircraft was leaking fuel, and the fuel was running down near the burning aircraft. We were sure the aircraft would either be damaged from exploding ammunition or exploding aircraft or both and possibly catch on fire from its own fuel. After taxiing up to the west end we stopped the aircraft. There were two tanks one tank and a tank retriever on the west taxiway. They had been ordered in by the Army to try and move our aircraft. They were blocking the taxiway and I couldn't taxi any further and I couldn't taxi too close to the O-1's.

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Sgt McKinnek and I then left the aircraft and went back to the area where I left my crew. The crew had moved from the position we had been in and the flight mechanic and I couldn't locate them. At the time I saw the navigator further on down to the south. We decided to stay approximately where we were primarily because secondary explosions had started and large chunks of shrapnel from the exploding artillery were being thrown 4 or 500 yards to the south. Well, in all directions, but it seemed to be most in going south. We finally got under a Catapillar tractor and stayed there about 3 1/2 hours while the secondary explosions continued.

The flight mechanic and I had to move from under there or felt that we should leave because the second aircraft had a pallet of ammunition on it and I think the majority of the pallet exploded simultaneously and hurled what appeared to be a 105 howitzer projectile under the Catapillar. Although it was a dud and I was sure it wouldn't go off, it was a little unnerving to sit there with that thing under there with us, so we collected not only the flight mechanic but two Army engineers and about four or five ARVN and we all departed for another area. This is when I joined up with the loadmaster and the other pilot about 100 yards further south.

We stayed there until about 1330 and at that time three Special Forces Sergeants from the Special Forces Camp at Dak To came looking for us. They were trying to locate all the Air Force people and they were spread out somewhat. They led us back into the Special Forces camp. We stayed in the Special Forces camp until about 1415, when we went back to our aircraft, which the Army tank retriever had moved under the taxiway by then. We went out to the aircraft to see the possibility of flying the aircraft out. After close examination of the aircraft we decided that it was flyable and at 1505 we departed Dak To for Tuy Hoa. We learned later there was a second attack on Dak To about 1545.

Our observations on aircraft damage and where they were damaged (the direction of fire) is not too clear. We do feel there is a possibility that fire came from either the south or north or both. Major Cokenick observed the second aircraft--the one directly in front of us--he observed a round go through the vertical stabilizer of the aircraft--for this reason we think it is doubtful that it was a mortar round--and it appeared that this particular round came from the north. The rest of them appeared to come from the south but it is extremely difficult to tell. Their fire was accurate. The third round hit on the ramp and the remainder of the rounds hit close in the vicinity that burned. It appeared that the first two were for ranging purposes and by the third round they had the area they wanted to hit fairly well zeroed in and the rest of them fell right in the close vicinity. The order in which rounds fell and which aircraft were hit is very difficult to tell. They did hit either aircraft or close to them with most of the rounds.

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Interview, Major Joseph Madden, ALO, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry, Kontum Province, 18 Nov 67.

The action which I'm going to attempt to describe concerns the 503rd Battalion of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Which was under operational control of the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, on 6 November. The action started with the preparation of a battalion-sized base camp on hilltop 823 which is located at YB 853187. The mission at the time was to clear the hilltop of very very dense bamboo forest which was predominately on the western part of the hill and the remainder of the hill which was a mixture of bamboo and very tall, probably 100 to 125 foot tall, trees which covered the remaining areas. The initial air strikes went in and prepared an LZ for the Engineering Platoon. We put the first strikes in at approximately 853187 which was down on the east slope of the hill. It took two air strikes to prepare that. We had #500 bombs on Hobos with Daisy Cutters and I think we had #1,000 on F-100s. And those two strikes cleared that area there. We then moved up the hill, the top of the hill, and started putting in the main LZ air strikes. The fifth air strikes went in at 11:46, the sixth at 12:47, and the seventh at 13:15.

At 13:45 the Army people flew over the hilltop and said it looked clear enough for them to begin their airlift and they started the airlift, B Company of the 503rd Battalion onto the hill. At 14:05 they reported AW weapons fire up to the north of the hill at 849201. Now this area was where they had placed three additional companies on the ground. Company A was placed on the ground at approximately 860202, Delta company was about 852201 and Charlie company was at 845203. It was Delta company that was beginning to receive the AW fire and requested an air strike. At 14:20 hours the air strike was diverted to support Delta company at 849201, the first strike arriving on the scene was Hammer 21, which had napalm and Mark 117s and a pistol.

The first bombs were dropped on the northern side of the ridge line which goes approximately YB 848203, somewhere in there. Then they dropped napalm to the west and the east side of the friendly positions. This napalm was dropped

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approximately 100 to 150 meters to the west and approximately 75 meters to the east of the friendly positions. Due to the AW fire being very intense in those two locations, I held the fighters with the bombs high and dry while we put the napalm in there. They then began to receive heavy AW fire from the ridgeline to the north of their position and between where the first bombs had hit and the bottom of the ridge. The company commander implied on the radio that it was a very very desperate situation. So I elected to ask the fighter to drop his remaining three #750 bombs in a string on a generally west to east heading and it turned out to be about 70 meters from the friendly location. And his three bombs struck on the southwest base of the ridge somewhere around 848202 or 203. And ended up about 70 meters from the friendly position, the friendly commander was very excited at this time and ask us to call off the air strikes. They were too close and he didn't have any holes to put his people in. But the commanding general of the 173rd Airborne, I believe his name is General ~~Schwartz~~, was flying around at that time and he later commented that the air strike was exactly where it had to be.

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OK following that air strike Hammer <sup>31</sup> another flight of F-4Cs, arrived on the scene. They also had napalm and 750 pound bombs. The situation around Delta company was still very sticky; they were still receiving fire from the real steep ravine which shows up on the map at about 853202. I violated one of the cardinal rules by running a fighter into the friendlies dropping napalm, but they dropped two cans of napalm exactly on target on a northeast to southwest run in heading. And it came up to within approximately 20 to 25 meters of friendly troops and knocked off the small arm and sniper fire that was coming from that ravine area. The other had six cans of napalm as I remember. He dropped two other cans of napalm to the rear of Delta company at about 853197 somewhere in there as the men had been receiving fire from that area. That effectively squashed that. His third pass was between A and D company on a north to south heading at about 855200 as both companies were receiving sporadic fire from that area and then they were able to link up. The #750 bombs from this flight were placed again on the northwest side of the ridgeline that is at approximately 848205 somewhere in that general area. For Hammer 21 I gave an estimated 13KBA and for Hammer 31 I gave an estimated 15 KBA. Because at both locations AW and small arms were both being fired and at the completion of their strike the fire had been effectively suppressed.

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When these air strikes were in progress, B Company which had been placed at the battalion fire support base also reported that they were receiving heavy AW fire from the north and northwest and almost directly west and they requested immediate air. At that time we had three flights of fighters on station so the immediate air request was not forwarded; we just used what we had. The first flight was Devil 51, which was a flight of three F-100s that had nape and #750 bombs. We placed the napalm in the draw on a west southwest to a east northeast run in heading at approximately YB 848187, the draw that goes in that area of the map. We placed the #750 bombs along that ridge which goes out to about 848188 or 189, out in that area. They also had #500 high-drag bombs which I placed closer to the perimeter at approximately 850188, somewhere in that area at the top of the little draw. I gave that flight 15 KBA, three AWs and two mortar positions destroyed.

The next flight we put in there was the Eagle 01 which was a flight of F-100s with #500 high-drag bombs and napalm. I placed them along the northern part of the perimeter due to their smaller size and their ability to work closer to the friendlies. They expended both the napalm and the #500 bombs at YB 850190. I gave them 10 KBA and two mortar positions destroyed. The HOBOS (A-1Es) we put in the area were CBU and napalm and we worked along that ridge which goes out to about 847190 in that area with the CBU and napalm. These air strikes effectively reduced the enemy opposition and no further contact other than sporadic sniper fire was experienced by any of the four companies at their locations.

Just a little bit in regards to the landing zone and the battalion fire base which we made at the top of hill 823 at 853186. It had turned out that this was a previously NVA battalion fire base and whenever they got up to the top of the hill they found over a hundred bunkers and foxholes with overhead covers with 14 NVA bodies discovered at that location and numerous blood trails indicating many many other wounded had been dragged away. In preparation of this fire base we had to use #1,000 bombs with the delayed fuze and these resulted in three large craters being

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formed on top of the hill and as it turned out later these craters were life savers for when B Company started receiving the heavy AW and B-40 rocket attack from their northwest and north, the whole company was able to take shelter in these three craters and that saved many many lives. That was just one of the quirks, something that wasn't necessarily planned but turned out the right way. This portion of the tape deals with the Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, and the contact from approximately 3 November to 11 November. The original operation began in that area with an air strike at YB 936134 on 1 November when two B-57s put in an air strike at those coordinates and got a large secondary explosion. They decided it was either an area of large storage area or extensive troop concentrations.

They decided to put in a combat assault on the top of hill 882, which is located at YB 918141. This went in on 3 November and the battalion was in there with two companies, A and D companies. They had sporadic contact on the 3rd, 4th and 5th mainly from the mortar fire on hill 843 located at 912143. We put a few air strikes in and around that position but it didn't seem to be effective. We later found out that there was an extensive bunker system up there. We were dropping MK-82s and napalm and it would probably have been more effective if we had 117s or #1,000 bombs. On the 5th, A company of the 3/8th attempted to move up to the top of hill 843 by proceeding down 882 across the valley there - a really steep valley, I might add - and come up to 843. But they met extensive resistance and were forced to withdraw back to 882 where they spent the night of 5 November.

On the 6th both A and B companies then began to assault up hill 843. They reached the summit with no opposition except an extensive booby trapped area from the bottom of the valley up along the ridgeline. They arrived at their night location of 6 November at the top of hill 843. The Air Force role on that operation on the 6th consisted almost entirely of putting air strikes on the top and the northern ridge that goes from the top of hill 843, and on the north and northwestern slopes.

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It was in that area that we uncovered numerous bunkers and got large secondary explosions with NVA bodies observed by the people on the ground. No body count was achieved at this time. However, we had many secondary explosions in and around hill 843 both on top and on the northern, north-western, and western ridges. On the morning of the 7th both A and D companies moved out to the north from 843 down the ridge line that goes almost due north along the 91 grid line and arrived at their night location at 906149. Both A and D companies assumed the same perimeter with it extending generally in an east to west heading along that small finger of a ridgeline that goes just south of the 15 grid line. The companies moved into their night location with no interference.

At 14:08 A company reported heavy contact and requested immediate air strikes with heavy smallarms and AW fire being directed against their position. At 14:22 D company reported that they were receiving mortar fire from the south. At 14:35 the first air strike consisting of three F-100s carrying napalm and 750s went in approximately 400 meters south of the night location of their present location. They were actually about 400-500 meters southwest of their location. And at 14:50 following the air strike they reported they were no longer in contact. At least D company was no longer receiving mortar fire. We had negative BDA on that air strike despite the fact it appears it may have knocked out the mortar position. At 15:08 they were still receiving small arms fire in A company and possibly rocket and mortar fire also. D company reported back in contact at that time. I requested artillery and they wanted an air CAP but at that time they were not asking for extra air on this particular contact. At 15:59 as both A and D company continued to receive heavy fire they put in a request for two more air strikes.

At 16:20 the first air strike of three F-100s again carrying six napalms and six #750 bombs went in followed by a flight of two F-100s carrying four napalms and four #750 bombs at 16:40. At 17:10 they had a flight of two F-100s that came off the alert pad litter 03 with eight 117s went in in support of the operation.

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At 17:25 Sabre 04 a flight of three F-100s carrying six napalm and six Mark 117s went in. The only one that got a BDA was the Sabre flight which was given one AW destroyed and two bunkers destroyed. The official Army report at 17:48 reports that A company is near the top of the hill, they have a machine gun wiped out, and they are securing it for D company. This was a matter of five to ten minutes following the completion of the last air strike. At that time there was no further opposition against the two companies in that location. It might be noted in passing that at 16:20 the official report reads that A company is completely surrounded by NVA and has 5 KIA, and many wounded. The air strike going in at that time as reflected by our records was Sabre 31 going in at 16:20. So a correlation in time is exact there. The 17:40 air strike completion represent the last of the contacts that A and D companies had on the 7th. The plan for the 8th was for both A and D companies to move along that ridgeline to the southwest to a little knole that is located on the 900 grid line about 148. We were going to make an instant LZ so that A company, which suffered numerous casualties, could be extracted. However, at 08:17 A and D company were under mortar attack and at 08:47 an immediate air request was submitted because D company thought they had spotted a mortar position. HOB0 was on station as a pre-planned. At 0850 they were expended and the BDA consisted of five bunkers destroyed. Following that air strike there were no more contacts with the enemy listed until 08:53 at which time A and D companies reported they had movement on their southeast and northeast and west. In the interim period we had placed four air strikes all sorts of ordnance but generally napalm and #750 bombs in an around their position. One was mainly to prepare the LZ at that knoll on the 900 grid line and the other in support of the sporadic contact, where the mortar position was spotted.

At 13:50 D company spotted unfriendly troops moving into their area and requested an air strike in their vicinity and at 14:35 and A and D companies had moved all around their perimeter. At 14:44 they reported a large element moving toward both A and D company locations. In support of that we had air strikes at 13:30, 14:20, 15:00, 15:08, 15:28 and at 16:12. No further

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comments in the records on any kind of activity around their perimeter until 16:55, at which time both A and D companies reported receiving grenades and mortar rounds upon their positions. At 17:20 they reported rifle grenades; at 17:35 they reported under going a heavy mortar attack with a ground attack on D company location. A flight of A-1Es was put in in this vicinity and dropped napalm within 30 feet of the perimeter. This resulted in approximately 15 enemy being burned by the napalm itself, including the firing crew of a heavy machine gun found the next morning burned in place while assuming their firing positions behind the gun. The napalm pass also caused approximately 50 NVA to panic in the heat of the flames and jump up and storm the perimeter where they were cut down by one M-60 machine gun. The gunner was reprimanded at the time for seemingly wasting his ammo by his company commander, who was not aware that the napalm had chased some many of the NVA soldiers out of the jungle. The last serious contact around the area of Company A and D for several hours occurred when the fire support base remote from the scene of this action received sporadic rocket/mortar attacks until late in the night.

A and D companies had very minor sporadic sniper fire in their position until 18:42. A company then reported heavy contact but D company on the same perimeter reported negative contact. Spooky, the AC-47 gunship, reported on station and was able to drop a few flares and determine the exact perimeter of A and D companies. He fired his machine guns to close proximity to the friendly perimeter. This was credited with breaking up this determined attack on the A company location. The last significant contact of the night of 8/9 November consisted primarily of policing around the perimeter. At that time they found 160 NVA KIA.

They then proceeded to move to the southwest along that ridge-line to the LZ which we had been preparing by the use of bombs both on the 8th and early on the 9th. They moved into the LZ located at YB 900148 at which location Charlie Company, 3/8th was inserted and Alpha company extracted and returned to the fire support base at Dak To. The rest of the day consisted mainly of sporadic mortar attacks of two or three rounds at a time against the LZ. We put

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numerous air strikes around the perimeter against suspected and positively identified mortar positions, resulting in three mortar positions destroyed by air. The 10th was another day of light patrolling and the B company was inserted into the LZ at 900148 in support of C and D companies. There was sporadic AW and mortar harassment fire into the LZ but negative U.S. casualties. There was a gunship shot down in the vicinity of the LZ and one air strike was placed in that area in support of the rescue operations which rescued three of the five crew members on the downed gunship. We also put in an air strike against a mortar position and resulted in one mortar position being destroyed by air.

On 11 November the Army made the final assault up hill 724, located at YB 896149. C company reached the top without opposition at 11:50 hours; D company closed shortly after that time, and B company the last company closed on the perimeter with C and D at 13:25. At 13:47 they reported B and D company receiving a heavy ground attack and requested immediate air. An air strike in response to this request was put in at 14:00 this was from a flight of F-100s that had been on station and holding for 35 minutes. The results of this strike which consisted of napalm and #500 bombs was that the ground attack upon the perimeter was completely squashed and no further ground attacks were being made against the ground forces. The comment made by D company commander, Captain Bell was, "God Bless the Air Force." He said that they had saved his whole company at that time.

On other parts of the perimeter, namely the southern flank of the hill 724 in the vicinity of YB 895147 defended by C company, contacts continued sporadically. At 11:40 a flight of A-1Es were put in with napalm and CBU. The CBU was put down ten meters from the friendly perimeter and resulted in 12 KBA. This was the last ground assault against the perimeter, only AW, rocket fire and sporadic small arms fire continued to come into the perimeter. The position of these AWs and mortars was the old night location back on the knoll at YB 900147 or 148. An additional air strike was placed on that location with the result of one mortar

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position being destroyed. By 15:16 they said all elements were located on hill 724 and were receiving fire from their old fire support base of the previous night. This was the last major contact of the 3/8 during this period.

That evening while speaking with the brigade commander, Colonel Johnson, in receiving the events of the day, Colonel Johnson made the comment, and this is as close to being an exact quote as I can remember. "I owe the United States Air Force one battalion for they certainly saved the lives of those three companies." This action refers to the 3/12th Inf. 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, on 3 and 4 November. The event started with an air assault into a previously prepared landing zone, which was prepared by two air strikes several days earlier on hill 978 located at ZB 013162. The air assault was completed with the first company on the ground at 1329. B company of the 3/12th was rapidly followed by the arrival of A company into the LZ. They made a successful combat assault. B Company moved west along the ridge line to ZB 008162 and prepared an additional landing zone for Alpha company for resupply for their own ordnance. At this LZ a platoon size patrol spotted two NVA soldiers who retreated west along the ridge line. They were followed by this platoon.

At 15:52 it was reported at YB 997163 that the patrol was in contact with an unknown size enemy force. They were receiving sporadic fire from a squad size force, followed rapidly by heavy small arms and mortar fire, pinning the platoon down. They fired artillery into the area and at 16:35 the contact was broken. However, immediate air strikes had been requested and they were placed in the area from which the AW and small arm fire had come. Immediate air strikes were on station at 16:52 with negative BDA. We proceeded to put three additional air strikes into the area for an hour with negative results. At least nothing was reported. That ended the main contact during this operation on the 3rd.

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It resumed at approximately 0835 the following morning when both A and B company reported they were receiving mortar fire. At that time a flight of A-1Es a preplanned flight was putting in an air attack consisting of nape and 500# bombs. They were diverted to the suspected mortar position with their napalm and the BDA at that time was two mortar positions destroyed. The 0830 preplanned flight of F-4s was also immediately placed on the mortar with one mortar position destroyed and one AW position destroyed and ten KBA. This strike went in from 0830 - 0900 and the official records show that at 0850 A company received its last mortar round. So the air strikes were very effective against these mortar positions at this particular time. Additional, air strikes were placed in the immediate area of the known destroyed mortar positions with negative BDA results.

At 1155 both A and B company, 3/12th, reported receiving heavy AW fire and mortar fire from heavily constructed bunkers. At 1215 they were still receiving heavy mortar and ground fire and the enemy was throwing grenades from the spiders holes. Our troops reported they were in contact with at least a battalion size force. They were really dug in with very heavy overhead cover . . . this is an direct quote from the official Army records. They requested nothing but 1000# bombs and would except no substitutes for it despite efforts made by the ALO to induce them to take 750# bombs with delayed fuzing. I was on station at this time and this bit of advice was not accepted. At 1415 hours a flight of two Navy A-4s arrived on station with four 1000# bombs and expended the ordnance on the target at YB 999162 with negative BDA. The friendlies started to withdraw under the air support although that we had warned them we were dropping 1000# bombs and the troops should be in holes. One man was lightly wounded by a bomb fragment from a 1000# bomb which went off approximately 200 meters from the desired target. Additional flights of fighters were in with the 750# bombs and delayed fuzing were expended on the target. The results of the air support for this day were three mortar positions destroyed and approximately 15 KBA.

A quick summary of the mortaring of Dak To when two C-130 were demolished by mortar rounds. The amazing thing was the accuracy of the attack. The first mortar round or recoilless rifle or type 75 artillery shell landed across the runway approximately 100 to 150 meters long. It landed in an unoccupied helicopter revetment. The second round struck a C-130 and immediately set fire. The third round hit the ammunition supply point and caused a minor explosion there. The fourth round struck the second C-130. They then struck the first C-130 for the second time and added to the conflagration. The second hit on the first C-130 was what really stopped anybody from possibly moving the aircraft as it blew the back end of the airplane onto the ground. The fire in the second C-130 was almost extinguished at that time, in fact the fire was completely out and was lightly smoking in the wings, when additional mortar rounds or shells struck and reignited the fire.

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Either from the exploding mortar rounds or exploding ammunition a third C-130 which had been parked behind the other two received shrapnel holes in the wing tank and started leaking fuel onto the ramp. Some crew members started the airplane and taxi to what was considered at that time to be a safe distance from the ammo dump to the burning airplane. A fourth C-130 was on the active runway at this time and as soon as the mortar attack began the aircraft took off and escaped without any damage. Fire spread and shrapnel was flying and it became apparent to the Army personnel that the third C-130 was in danger of being destroyed by fire. They sent a tank down to the ramp and hooked a chain to the forward gear of the C-130 and towed it to the west taxiway of the parking ramp just short of the runway intersection. In my opinion this saved this aircraft from being completely demolished by fire. Flaming shrapnel and other debris landed all around the area from which the C-130 was towed and, with the tremendous amount of fuel leaking out of the wings, I feel this airplane would have shortly caught fire and been destroyed had it not been towed away. They used a tank because they had shrapnel flying all around, anything from 10 to 12 inches long and five inches across parts of 105 shells exploding in the ammo dump. It was not considered safe to send anything onto the ramp except a tank. The initial exploding ammunition had been unloaded from one of the C-130s on the ramp and had not been moved into the ammo dump proper.

When the fire appeared to be coming under control and in fact was almost extinguished, they ran out of water. They had to get the water tank refilled and when they returned the fire had spread and become incontrollable. Fuel from the burning airplanes had flowed into an area where tar had been stored in barrels, causing the tar to melt, catch fire, and flow into the ammo supply point itself. Also, additional shells exploding on the ramp flew into the ammo dump and caused additional fires in a chain reaction. Aircraft continued to burn until very late in the afternoon. I think over 16,000 (sic) rounds of 105 ammunition went up.

There was one tremendous explosion just about 0930 at night which knocked down a guard standing in the TOC (about a half mile from the scene of the explosion). I was sitting in the TOC in line with the doorway and I was knocked out of my chair and against the wall about three feet back. It was the most violent explosion I ever encountered. The whole area was a brilliant red like the pictures you see when an atom bomb goes off that very, very deep dull

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red glow along with the blinding brilliance of such a great explosion. I thought this would be just about the end of the main explosion but later on there was another violent explosion not nearly as bad as the former one. It went off about 1130 or 1145 at night. It was the connex C-4 explosive that went up. The fires gradually died down and all the ammo was expended and the other equipment in the area was burned out. In addition the Special Forces Camp with the buildings where the dependents of the ARVN troops lived caught on fire. This led to the to the dispatched of armored personnel carriers and tanks to evacuate the civilians. Again, the APs and the tanks were in use because of the tremendous amount of shrapnel flying all over the area, red hot and setting fires to almost everything when it hit the ground.

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Interview, Captain Philip D. Gritten, FAC  
 3rd/12th Inf (1st Bde/4th Inf Div.), Kontun Province, RVN, 18 Jan 68.  
 The Battle for Hill 1338.

The 3rd /12th Inf of 1st Bde/4th Inf Div was to secure Hill 1338 due south of Dak To 2-3 miles. They started from the SW along ridgeline hoping to secure the top of the hill by the evening of the 16th November. They started up and got, I would say, approximately 7-800 meters from the top of this hill and they started coming into light contact, mainly from small weapons fire. They proceeded on up, I would say, close to 6-700 meters and were under such intense fire that they had to pull back NW along the ridge [ie. they had been headed SE] and they withdrew NW approximately 200 meters.

Meantime I was airborne from Dak To at about 1500 meters in an O-1 and had put in approximately two flights on the top of Hill 1338. The very peak of the hill had been fairly well cleared of foliage, mainly from repeated flights of the last two weeks since it had been a suspected-known-enemy location for sometime. So, I was putting these 750 and 500 pound bombs with napalm approximately 700 meters from the friendlies, but actually, I wouldn't say we were in close air support, we were clearing the top of the hill of any mortar positions or anything that might be affecting the battle a little further down the slope.

Well, as soon as they got into contact and withdrew this 200 meters, they called in napalm and 500 and 750 pound general purpose bombs. I was able to get the napalms about 100 to 150 meter from the friendly position, and the results of this were unknown. These bombs-I had to put up 200 meters from the top of the ridge. It cleared a little foliage but we were unable to see any bunkers or trenches at that time.

As I remember, there were four flights. This can be later validated. I know I put in two in support of the 3rd/12th. Units in this movement were two companies of the 3rd/12th Alpha Company and Charlie Company. It later turned out that they were [redacted] facing the figure of battalion strength, or possibly a little bit more, of NVA, supported with mortars, light to heavy automatic weapons, and numerous small arms weapons.

At this point due to the approaching darkness, it was decided they would retire from the position down the ridge to which they had already retreated to set up night camp and that the rest of the operation would go on the next day.

The next morning Major Madden, the brigade ALO, was up very early putting in air strikes between 7 and 9 that morning on the mountain itself. He started up around the peak. I was airborne around 9 O'clock and relieved Major Madden on station. They [the 2 companies] were starting up. They had gotten past the forward position they had the night before and, I would say, they were right around 3-400 meters from the top of the hill.

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They were picking up very intense small arms fire and they had spotted several bunkers and a trench line above them. Of course, the hill at this point was rather steep and they were working up hill all the time. They requested airstrikes. There were four sets of jets and two sets, I know of, of A-1E's and, to my knowledge, two sets had already been put in before and several put in later.

Of these fighters, I put them in near the top of the hill with their hard ordnance, and I would say, we were working within 200 meters of the friendly position with the napalm and trying to cut this down as close as possible to around 100 meters. The big work was done by the A-1E's, mainly because they had the capability of delivering more closely than the jets to the friendly position. I was asked to put these directed fighters within 50 meters of the friendly positions. It may sound very simple but actually it was quite difficult, mainly because we had to defend as best we could, the friendly positions. It must be noted that they were not bunkered, they were behind trees as much as they could, possibly a few of them found a bunker or a fighting trench to slip into. I'd say that was the exception. Mainly they were hugging the ground and using what foliage they could to cover themselves. They had reached a slight elbow and were passed this elbow 100 meters on up the ridge. This elbow runs almost north or slightly northeast and connected to this ridge they had been on the night before from the northwest. Alpha Company was on this knoll of this ridge down the western side and Charlie Company was on the knoll down the eastern side trying to sweep up this ridge. Alpha Company had been pinned down by heavy machine guns in two bunkers which they wanted us to put in. They were giving us every direction except the right direction, and the battalion commander who was in the C&C chopper was also just as confused as I was. Between the two of us we resolved where they were by them popping smoke. And that's when we knew they were really confused. They gave their position of where their smoke was and it didn't match. As soon as we got this straightened out, we put in the first set of A-1E's with napalm. [Capt Grittensaid some other ordnance also put in which he thought was 250 and 500 GP farther up the slope.] We started in. They got within 100 meters to the friendlies and worked it down to 75. They said we still need to come closer with the napalm, so we worked it north to the friendlies to about 50 meters. We knew we had the range by then but, unfortunately, we were out of ordnance.

The second flight of Hobos arrived on station then. The position ~~was~~ was well worked by smoking napalm by that time. They, the ground troops, said we need it 25 meters closer to the friendlies. We're talking already about 50 meters from the friendlies. They wanted it 25 meters closer, which obviously added up to 25 meters from the friendlies. Both aircraft were carrying napalm at this time. The lead came in and he put down his napalm about 50, possibly 45, meters, from the friendlies. "Two" came in and but his in. I'd already told him about 25 meter from the friendlies, but I knew it was close. How close, we soon found out. Alpha Company said, "I think we've moved it close enough, the trees are burning over my head."

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I was quite worried at this time and I knew at that time they weren't 50 meters from the previous napalm too. He said that was fine and to move it 20 meters back up the slope; which we did. He said, "I don't know if we got those machine gun rests, oops, we don't have one. He's firing again, I hear exploding AK-47 rounds." We knew we were close. They said they could hear other ordnance exploding up there, indicating nape had done a fairly effective job, at least some of their supplies and how many men, we didn't know.

At this point we ran out of A-1's, they were going back to refuel. We put in the jets on what was left on up the hills. I'll let him carry the rest of the battle clear up the hill.

I did return that evening just after the hill had been secured. I think the time was 1718, immediately when it was secure.

At this point another set of Hobos arrived on station. All the jets had been expended. We found out that, by a fluke, it was going to be possible to resupply both companies that evening. At first we didn't know this, but I recommended we hold these Hobos for aircraft. Again, this is another one of the values of having an aircraft of long endurance. For one hour Hueys landed, evacuated all the wounded, put in all new replacements, resupplied with food, ammunition, water (they had hoped to have this done by by the next afternoon). Of course, we were orbiting right over head immediately if any contact broke out. Fortunately, nothing did.

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